OLD!

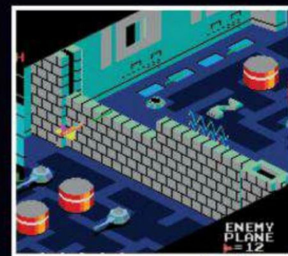
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

THE AWARD **WINNING** GAMES MAGAZINE

CLASSIC GAME
ZAXXON
HOW SEGA PUT A UNIQUE SPIN ON THE TRADITIONAL SHOOT-'EM-UP





Behind the scenes of one of the UK's biggest publishing houses

PLUS
THE GREAT ESCAPE
CREATOR JOHN HEAP DISCUSSES HIS OCEAN-PUBLISHED HIT

+ KEY OCEAN STAFF REUNITE
Jon Woods
Gary Bracey
Simon Butler
Bill Harbison
Bob Wakelin
Mark Jones
James Higgins
Paul Hughes

RE-EDUCATION TIME
BBC MICRO
DEVELOPERS EXPLAIN WHAT MADE THE BEEB A GREAT GAMES MACHINE

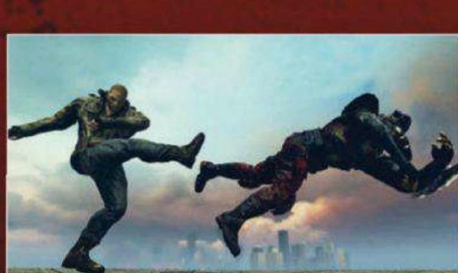
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COLLECTION
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PS3
Silent Hill: Downpour
15
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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE OCEAN GAME



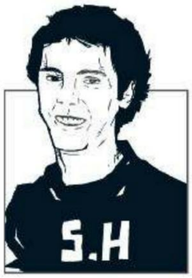
DARRAN JONES

Hard one. I love the originality of *Head Over Heels*, but I also adore Ocean's adaptation of *Jurassic Park*. I'm sitting on the fence.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Unit 13

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



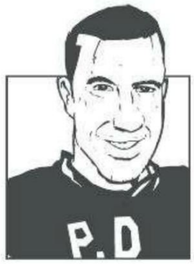
STUART HUNT

Though *The Addams Family* is fantastic, it has to be *RoboCop* for me. It's a great licensed game, with excellent visuals and fantastic music, and it's also based on one of my favourite films.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing:
Syndicate (online)

Favourite game of all time:
Syndicate (online)



PAUL DAVIES

Hunchback!

Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall.

Currently playing:
Halo: Reach

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



IAIN LEE

Daley Thompson's Decathlon for me.

Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live

Currently playing:
Halo: Reach

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC Model B version)



JASON KELK

Wizball for the C64 was Ocean's finest moment for me. A solid shooter with a twist that will still be worth another go even after looping it.

Expertise:
Reassembling hardware and finding leftover screws

Currently playing:
Genetos (PC)

Favourite game of all time:
Io



PAUL DRURY

The weird and wonderful *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*. I remember dancing to the live version of *Relax* that came with it while trying to work out what to do, on many levels.

Expertise:
Rear touch

Currently playing:
Uncharted: Golden Abyss

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep in Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

It's a toss-up between *Frankie Goes To Hollywood* and *Wizball*, with the latter winning for the 'TSSSHHHH' sound effect.

Expertise:
Games that don't require 37 fingers to play

Currently playing:
Gridrunner for iOS

Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



ANDREW FISHER

It has to be *Wizball*, Sensible Software's amazing shoot-'em-up. Even better value on the *Magnificent Seven* compilation.

Expertise:
Commodore 64 and Nintendo through the ages

Currently playing:
Jars' Revenge (C64)

Favourite game of all time:
Paradroid



RICHARD BURTON

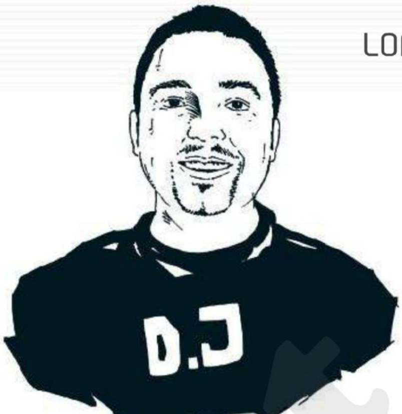
Cavelon. A simplistic medieval maze game that accounted for too many hours of gameplay. Charming, infuriating and addictive in equal measure.

Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense

Currently playing:
Jet Set Willy Online

Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...

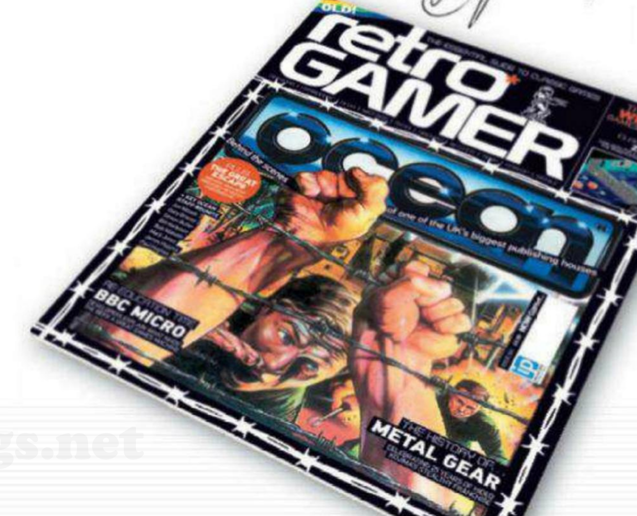


As we approached issue 100, I started to panic. I was constantly asking myself if, after 100 issues, we'd finally run out of things to say about our beloved hobby.

Two weeks into issue 102 and my fears were unfounded: we've got plenty in the pipeline. Take this month's Ocean feature, for example. We haven't covered the company in any significant way since issue 23, an astonishing six years ago, and our new feature is so exhaustive that we'll not need to revisit it for another six.

Retro Gamer occasionally gets accused of constantly covering the same ground. I disagree, but I do understand the argument. Sure, we cover certain systems, companies and franchises more than others, but it's always from a fresh angle. After all, if we simply repeated the same anecdotes and info, we'd have disappeared a long time ago.

There are many anniversaries this year, including Ultimate, Spectrum, *Mega Man*, C64, Atari, *Street Fighter*, *Final Fantasy* and more. We'll be celebrating them all – providing we can find an angle that we feel is relevant. Rest assured, though, it won't be at the expense of less popular machines and franchises. Needless to say, you can expect to see far more variety in future issues.

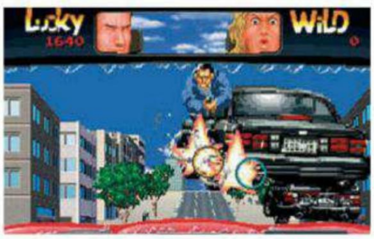


CONTENTS



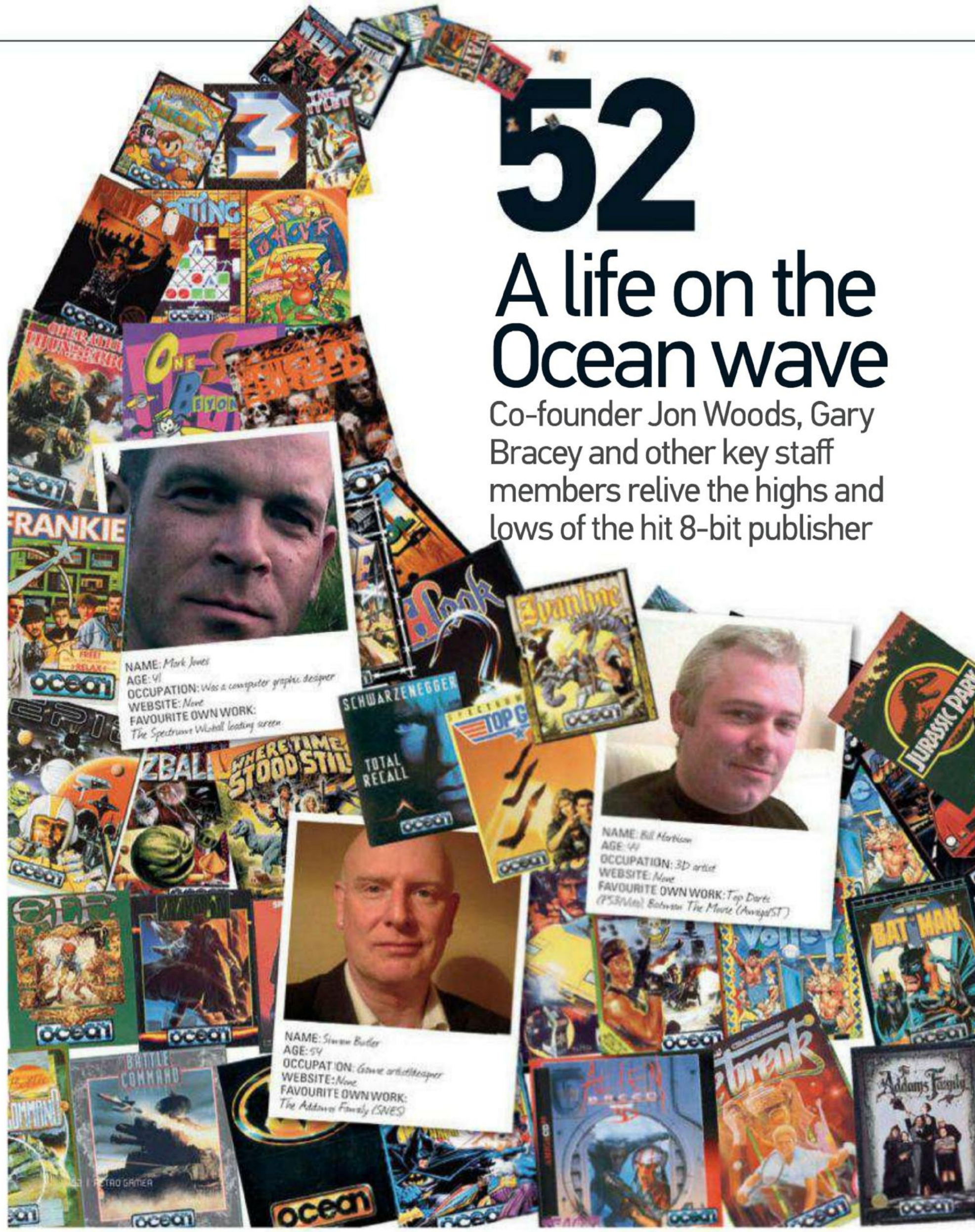
>> Load 101 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED



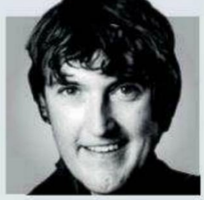


108



RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…









"Age has done nothing to diminish its beauty"

Darran Jones



ESSENTIALS

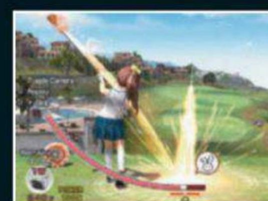






RETRO RATED





retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL









retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> One of the earliest computer games celebrates its 50th anniversary, while several Atari veterans get together under a new studio to make brand new iOS games. We also note the passing of pinball legend Steve Kordek

* CONTENTS





» [PDP-1] It might not look special, but *Spacewar!* is a surprisingly addictive game for two players.

Images courtesy of Marty Goldberg.

SPACEWAR! HITS 50

WORLD'S FIRST SHOOTER CELEBRATES ITS 50 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Famous for being the first computer game that let you shoot something, the seminal *Spacewar!* celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

Created in 1962 by MIT students Steve Russell, J. Martin Graetz and Wayne Witaenem, *Spacewar!* was created in their spare time, and was originally conceived as a project to demonstrate the capabilities of the vector monitor that had been installed to the college's DEC PDP-1 minicomputer. While brainstorming ideas, inspired by a love of Toho Japanese cinema and Edward Elmer's *Lensman* series of books, they decided to base their program around the themes of shooting and science fiction, and agreed that it should take the form of an electronic game rather than a simple visual program.

Despite the modest limitations of the PDP-1 (which at the time was actually pretty powerful) *Spacewar!* still impresses today, containing a remarkable amount of innovative ideas for such an early computer game, many of which were gradually added as the game evolved throughout the Sixties. The seminal versus game finds two players battling it out with abstract spaceships, famously dubbed the needle and the wedge, while manoeuvring around the gravity well of a star that sits in the centre of the screen. The addition of the star added a measure of strategy to the gameplay, allowing more skilled players to use its deadly pulling powers to their tactical advantage.

As well as avoiding enemy missiles and collision with the deadly sun, players also had to be mindful of their depleting rocket fuel and limited number of missiles with which to take down their opponent. And, adding further tension, a later enhancement of the game added a 'last ditch' means to evade collision by way of a hyperspace button that would instantly pluck the player's ship from the game and reposition it somewhere randomly on the playing field, though not always in an advantageous place.





> “The seminal versus game finds two players battling it out with abstract spaceships”

As a result of its frantic gameplay, *Spacewar!* soon caught the interest of students around campus. And once word of its brilliance spread it was promptly packaged as test software by DEC with PDP-1s, loaded into its core memory. Upon purchase of a PDP, a buyer could set it up and turn the machine on, and if *Spacewar!* flashed up then they knew it had shipped fine, if it didn't then they knew there was a problem. *Spacewar!* was also ported to a number of early computer formats, including PDP-1 Successors, and more recently, Microsoft included an updated version of the game in its XNA Game Studio programming kit.

To mark the momentous occasion of *Spacewar!*'s 50th anniversary, students at MIT were invited to attempt to faithfully emulate the game on a comparable piece of palm-sized hardware – amazing as, despite being dubbed a minicomputer, the PDP-1 was a hulking great computer the size of a fridge. That *Spacewar!* is still earning news pages and the interests of students half a century on is a testament to its importance to the industry. It wouldn't be remiss to suggest it led the way for gaming's early fascination with space combat and simulation, laying down the foundation for countless classic games to follow in its wake, including Nutting Associates' *Computer Space* and Atari's vector classic *Asteroids*. Its influence on the early videogame industry cannot be underplayed. *



Before Spacewar!

***Spacewar!* was certainly the most influential, but it wasn't the first…**

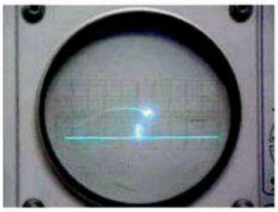
NIM

A simple game of number-based strategy, *NIM* is played using three 'heaps' of any value. Play involves taking turns to remove any value from each heap with the ultimate goal being to ensure that they are the last one to have a turn. An electronic version of *NIM* was created for the NIMROD computer. Designed by the now defunct electronic firm Ferranti, it was the first computer to be designed specifically to play a computer game.

OXO

An electronic game of noughts and crosses (tic-tac-toe), *OXO* was created for the EDSAC by Cambridge University professor Alexander S Douglas. The first computer game to feature digital graphics, it allowed players to compete against the computer in a game of noughts and crosses (*WarGames*-style). As the EDSAC was built and remained in the university, the game never received widespread recognition.

Tennis For Two



One of the more well-known early computer games, *Tennis For Two* was created by American physicists William Higinbotham in 1958, and was a digital recreation of tennis/ping pong displayed through an oscilloscope and played using a combination of buttons and dials. Created by Higinbotham to relieve the boredom of visitors to the laboratory, it quickly became a popular attraction and an enhanced version was created the following year.

The influence of Spacewar!

It's far reaching…



Computer Space

Though it's not a complete facsimile, *Computer Space does* share a number of notable similarities with *Spacewar!*. It's a time-based shooting game that sees the player avoiding attack, while trying to destroy a pair of flying saucers. Released a year before *Pong* in 1971, it is the first-ever mass produced arcade videogame.



Space Wars

As its unsubtle title insinuates, *Space Wars* was directly influenced by *Spacewar!*. Created by Cinematronics founder Larry Rosenthal, it is notable for being the first vector arcade game and plays just like the PDP-1 game.



WarTech: Senko No Ronde

Looking for more recent evidence of *Spacewar!* influence? Look no further than G.rev's *WarTech: Senko No Ronde*. Released in arcades and on Xbox 360, it blends the fighting and shooter genres together and sees players battling it out with giant robots.

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. He used to present the 11 O'Clock Show, but please don't hold that against him. You can find more information about Iain at **www.iainlee.com**



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits and The 11 O'Clock Show, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro gaming

A world of criminals who operate above the law

When I was nine years old, *Knight Rider* started. I remember it really well because I, for some reason, made the decision NOT TO WATCH IT. Yeah, my screwed up nine-year-old thinking reasoned that an American series about a talking car that could jump over things would be rubbish. To make matters worse, I chose to watch *Forbidden Planet*, which was on BBC2 at the same time. I think we can all safely agree that *FP* is a load of guff. A terrible film. Sure, it has some sort of kitsch value and is probably really important in the development of cinema, but it's pony.

At school the next day, I was left out of the conversations that were going around the playground as everyone was banging on about *Knight Rider* and playing *Knight Rider* and totally bumming *Knight Rider*.

Gutted.

I never made the same mistake again and made sure I watched what has to be one of the greatest TV series of all time, every single week.

My friend Jamie was the only other person I knew who had a Dragon 32. I would quite often lend him games, although he rarely reciprocated. One day he came into school with a huge grin on his face.

"Iain, you will never guess what game I got yesterday," he gushed.

"What? What was it?" I replied, excited.

"I got *Knight Rider*. It's amazing. It talks, it has turbo boost and it looks just like the TV series."

Shit. This was too good to be true. Jamie and I were often shunned for having what many perceived, incorrectly, to be a rubbish computer. But now we had some real currency, a *Knight Rider* game that looked just like the show. Jamie promised he would bring the game in for me the next day and let me borrow it. I could not wait.

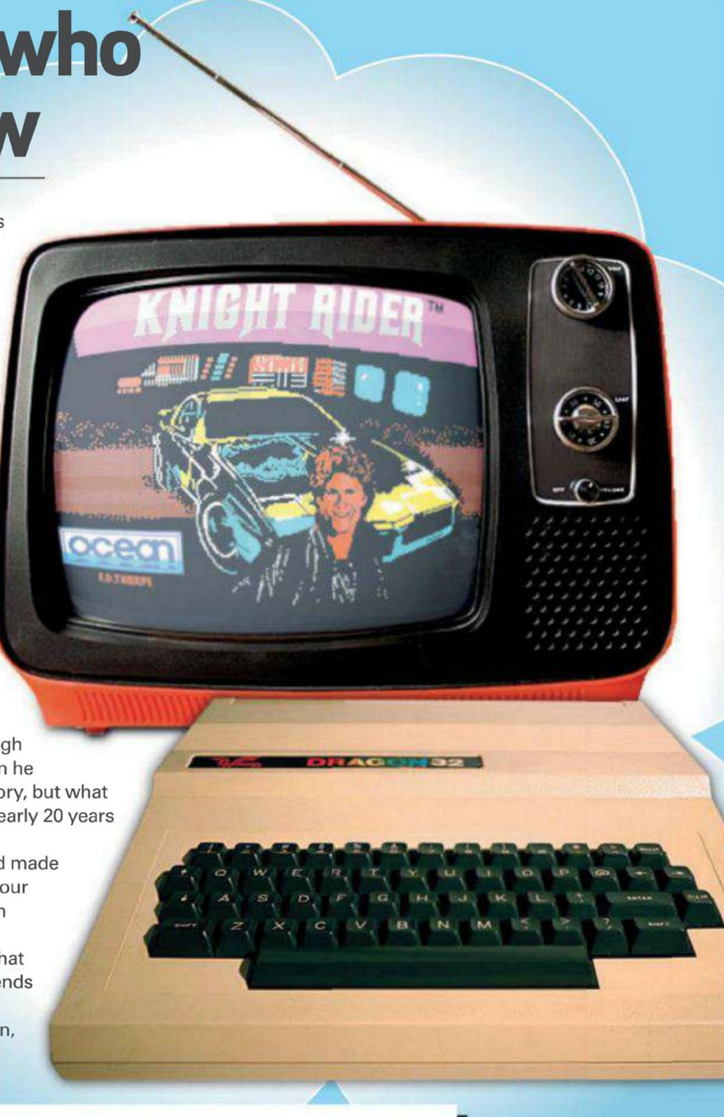
But wait I did. For a very long time. Every day I would see Jamie and ask if he'd brought the game in. He would slap his forehead to indicate he had been a huge divvy and that he would DEFINITELY bring it in tomorrow.

Tomorrow, as we are all aware, is always a day away. That game never turned up and each day I was devastated.

I forgot about this until about six months ago, when I thought I would track down the *Knight Rider* game for my old computer and make some sort of spiritual peace with my old school friend. After a fair bit of online searching, it turns out that no such game ever existed! I had totally been lied to. One can only wonder what was going through that nine-year-old's head when he concocted such a bullshine story, but what is amazing is that it took me nearly 20 years to discover I had been lied to.

I suspect we all boasted and made up stuff about videogames in our youth. The world was so much bigger when I was nine, and anything seemed possible. What nonsense did you tell your friends in an attempt to look cool?

Still, if I ever see Jamie again, he's totally getting a Chinese burn off me.



What nonsense did you tell your friends in an attempt to look cool?

ARCADE VETS RE-UNITE

CLASSIC ARCADE DEVELOPERS JOIN FORCES FOR A BRAND NEW SMARTPHONE VENTURE

It's a place where experimentation and imagination can flourish, a development studio can be a single person working from their shed, and if your game doesn't sell a gazillion copies the likelihood is you won't face financial ruin. We are of course referring to the mobile games market, which in recent years has become an attractive place for not only bedroom programmers to showcase their talents to the world, but also something of a nostalgic retreat for veterans of the games industry.

Jeff Minter, Colin Jones, Peter Harrap and the Pickfords have all released games for iOS, and it was only a matter of time before the same thing started happening with veterans across the pond. Of course, our American friends always have to go bigger than everyone else, and in keeping with that tradition is the news that a number of US arcade veterans have teamed up for a brand new start up mobile games company called Innovative Leisure.

Partly funded by THQ, and headed up by the co-creator of the Xbox, Seamus Blackley and business partner Van Burnham, Innovative Leisure's inception has been encouraged by the swift growth of super affordable mobile gaming and the popularity of playing classic and retro inspired games on portable devices.

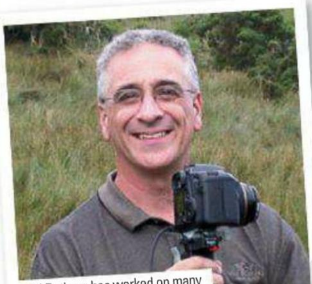
In an exclusive interview with the website VentureBeat, Blackley explained how Innovate Leisure's impetus will be to develop games that will offer classic arcade experiences on mobile devices. "We are looking at the new arcade, and 99 cents on the iPhone is the new quarter," said Blackley. "People are playing on all these new devices and are finding the joy of the arcade games."

Blackley also recognizes that the most accessible and instantly gratifying arcade games were always the most popular and successful, and these two qualities also work well in mobile gaming. An impassioned Blackley has thus assembled what can only be described as the gaming equivalent of *The Expendables*. A who's who of arcade veterans, the names include ex-Atari luminaries, Ed Logg, Ed Rotberg, Dennis Koble, Rich Adam, Owen Rubin, Bruce Merrit, and Cinematronic game designer Tim Skelly, and each will be paired up with an intern to mentor and work on projects with.

At the time of writing there was no word as yet on what Innovative Leisure's first title will be, but the interview revealed that seven are currently in development, all of which are in the prototype stage.







» Ed Rotberg has worked on many Atari games, including *Battlezone*.

The Innovative Leisure team

ED ROTBERG
Ed Rotberg is probably most famous for programming Atari's *Battlezone*, but also worked on the racing games *Hard Drivin'* and *Asteroid*'s sequel *Blasteroids*.

OWEN RUBIN
Famous for creating the superb vector graphic title *Major Havoc*, Rubin also contributed to *Gravitar* and *Battlezone*.

DENNIS KOBLE
Dennis Koble is perhaps best known for the arcade – and later handheld – game *Touch-Me*, and for co-designing and programming *Sprint 2*.

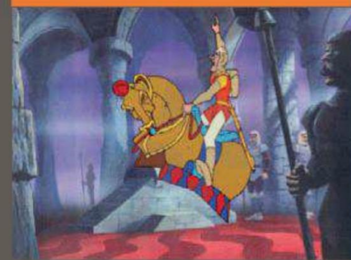
BRUCE MERRITT
Bruce is most famous for being behind the design and creation of the slick twin-stick vector shooter *Black Widow*.

RICH ADAM
Richard programmed *Gravitar* and also worked on *Missile Command* and *Night Stocker*.

ED LOGG
Ed's game credits include *Gauntlet*, *Xybots*, *Centipede*, *Millipede*, *Steel Talons* and of course *Asteroids*. He's a game-creating legend.

TIM SKELLY
The only non-Atari member of the team, Tim's Vectorbeam/ Cinematronic games are no less fantastic. He designed *Warrior*, the first ever one-on-one fighting game, and the superb *Star Castle*.

MICROBYTES
Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



>> Dragon's Lair Reopened
Released in 1983, *Dragon's Lair* stood out from other arcade games thanks to its stunning animated visuals, drawn by Don Bluth, and made possible with its LaserDisc technology. An interactive cartoon adventure in the purest sense, it's to be celebrated in a forthcoming documentary featuring interviews with the original creators and offering fans an in-depth look behind its creation. Check out the teaser trailer at: http://tinyurl.com/6qhkqtw



>> Grin, Strider and Streets Of Rage
Evidence of two aborted projects at defunct Swedish developer Grin has appeared on Spanish gaming website Anait Games. Released by a former Grin Barcelona employee, the assets include concept art from the studio's cancelled *Final Fantasy Fortress* title, and a teaser trailer of a moody-looking *Strider* remake. According to reports, the developer was also working on a new *Streets of Rage* game.



>> Point and Kick
In a bid to prudently support development of a brand new 'classic point-and-click' game, Tim Schafer's Double Fine Productions turned to kickstarter.com. The target of $400,000 was smashed within hours, and at the time of writing the amount raised had risen to over two million dollars. Double Fine say the extra money will be invested into enhancing the game and releasing it across more platforms and in more languages.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

On the three, or after three?

Of the things that make me scrub my face so hard that my eyebrows stick out like Oscar the Grouch, the token gesture of dual analogue sticks on PS Vita is now in the top three [pause to scrub my face].

What I'm about to say is probably unimportant, unless your favourite games are *FIFA* and *Call Of Duty*. Sony fell at the last hurdle with PS Vita from an old-school point of view. Instead of being a PlayStation DualShock surrounding a gorgeous OLED screen, it's a halfway house between an iOS/Android device and a trad gaming handheld. But so what?

The controller as we know and sort of love it today is a slightly intimidating mass of sticks, buttons and triggers adaptable to almost anything. It's gone about as far as it can go without becoming ridiculous. But in the absence of anything sensible to add, it seems ridiculous will have to do.

I suppose it won't matter ten years from now, when we've basically rolled over to let the waggling and touch-screen revolution eat out our throats. Oh, how we might laugh… or gargle, minus throat.

So PS Vita is missing a couple of shoulder buttons and click-in sticks. It's no big deal. You can swipe the screen to melee or tap the touch panel at the back to aim your shots. You'll get used to it. Or you won't. See what you think and let us know, cheers.

When Nintendo added X and Y buttons, then later L and R shoulder buttons, this was part of a controlled evolution. Same thing with the analogue stick for N64, it was a purposeful act with a definite goal in mind. Even though Nintendo introduced motion-sensing gaming to entice the mainstream, the software that they've brought out since has kept the concept in check. The best compliment I heard paid to Wii before it came out was that it worked, but not to get too excited.

Maybe this isn't all bad, if you'll allow me some thinking out loud. Eventually touch-screen gaming and arm waving might evolve to become something like *eXistenZ*, a sort of touchy-feely combination of mind control and pulsating bio-organic spinal dongle. At the moment, I don't feel in control.

Sensory deprivation is a form of torture, and it's the reason why waggle sticks and hands-free gaming are infuriating. I love *Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster for Kinect*, but it's not a skill challenge. It doesn't matter if you make mistakes. But if I'm taking pleasure out of refining control, even for something as basic as *Tetris*, I need to know that my actions take immediate effect.

The way *Mario* builds momentum in *Super Mario World* is a fine-tuned gaming component linked to instantaneous direction from the controller. It's held perfectly in place, just as the mouse and keyboard combination enables insane tournaments on *Counter-Strike*. The twin sticks of *Smash TV*, the arse-bruising *Daytona USA* cabinets allowing for rough handled power-sliding, both are similarly brilliant.

But here I am poking at the screen in *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*, trying to hack away at some bamboo with my finger. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't. Never mind, eh.

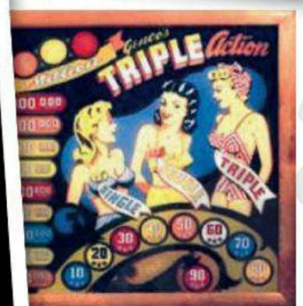
It's a halfway house between an iOS/ Android and a trad gaming handheld



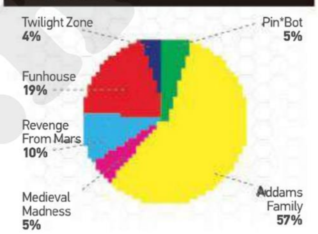
» Steve with a *Revenge From Mars* machine, running from the yet to be released *Pinball 2000*, the last ever pinball hardware and software platform produced by Williams.



» Steve shows off some original design artwork used for the William's pinball game *Space Mission*.



FORUM OPINION
Best pinball machine



PINBALL WIZARD PASSES

PINBALL LEGEND STEVE KORDEK DIES AGED 100

Steve Kordek may not be a name familiar to many, but in the world of pinball he's a legend, and possibly the closest it's ever had to a Ralph Baer or Shigeru Miyamoto. He was an American businessman and talented innovator who designed over 100 pinball machines for Genco, Williams and Bally. Steve, who passed away on 19 January, was responsible for bringing many innovations to the frenetic game of pinball.

Steve's shining career in pinball began in 1937, aged 26. He was walking down a street in Chicago and it began to rain. He dashed inside the factory of Genco, a manufacturer of coin-op game machines, simply to take shelter, and came away with a job. While at Genco, Steve was taken under the wing of its main game designer Harvey Heiss, who mentored and set him on the road to a long and amazing career in the pinball industry.

After learning his art from Heiss, in 1962 Steve eventually joined Williams Electronics and producing as many as seven to eight pinball machines a year quickly became an important and respected designer in the industry. Many of the advancements Steve is credited for quickly became staples of pinball, and helped transform, modernise and popularise the game.

Just some of the seminal tables he designed include *Triple Action* (Genco), the first table to feature just two inward facing flippers at the bottom of a table, *Vagabond* (Williams), the first game to have drop targets, and *Beat The Clock* (Williams), which was the first to introduce multi-ball. Steve eventually moved away from hands-on pinball design and into a more advisory role at Williams, where he helped guide, inspire and cultivate the next generation of pinball game designers.

In December 2011 Steve celebrated his 100th birthday, and many fans and close friends joined to celebrate at a party held in Illinois in January. Eugene Jarvis was one of those who were in attendance and had these words to say about Kordek's sad passing.

"Steve Kordek was a hundred year old kid. I met Steve back in 1979 at Williams Electronics, when I was the new pinball programmer. He had already been in the industry for almost 50 years, and he spent a lot of time mentoring a new generation of young pinball designers.

"The concept of retirement had no meaning to Steve, since every day of designing and playing new pinball machines was a vacation for him. Even after they shut down the pinball division he continued to work, organising his amazing archives of 80 years of pinball memorabilia. I think they finally had to throw his desk into the Chicago River to stop him from coming in.

"Just a couple weeks ago, we had the chance to celebrate his 100th birthday. And out of the 100+ friends and family in the room, he knew everyone by name. I asked him what his secret was that kept that twinkle in his eye for all these years. Without hesitation he answered, 'Make sure to play a good pingame everyday'."

Many thanks to www.thepinballblog.com and Jim Schelberg of www.pingamejournal.com for their help.

THE Vault

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Mario Kumukumu Puzzle

- **RRP:** $10.99 (approx £7)
- **Buy it from:** www.bigbadtoystore.com

You could fill an ocean with the amount of *Mario* merchandise that gets produced every 60 minutes, but this month we'd like to draw your attention to these rather cool *Mario* Kumukumu puzzles from Japan. As they require assembly, these 39-piece 3D puzzles of Nintendo's famous mascot are more entertaining than the usual character models we see time and time again. They also come in two flavours, standard dress Mario and fire type.





Arcade Money Box

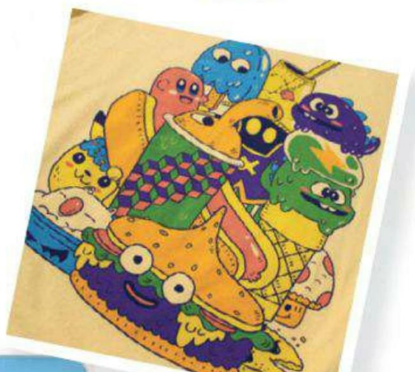
- **RRP:** £8.40
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

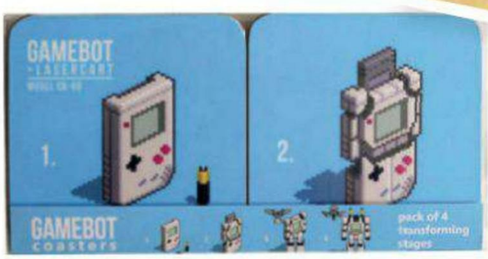
Other than the *Sonic* money banks we featured last month we can think of no better place to store your hard earned savings than in than inside one of these novelty arcade cabinets. Not only will you be storing money in a place no one will ever expect if you're aged 18 and over, but as an added bonus every time you deposit a coin your reward for saving is two minutes of play time on an integrated shooter inspired by *Space Invaders*.

dk value meal T-shirt

- **RRP:** $24 (approx £15)
- **Buy it from:** www.meatbun.us

This colourful T-shirt from Meat Bun features a whole host of familiar classic gaming characters but portrays them as food products. Bub and Bob are drawn as scoops of ice cream, Q*Bert a milkshake, and Dragon Quest's blue slime as a disgusting looking purple, bubbly, pointy tipped burger. A striking shirt and a great concept brilliantly executed. Where do we empty our wallets?





Gamebot coaster

- **RRP:** £9.99
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

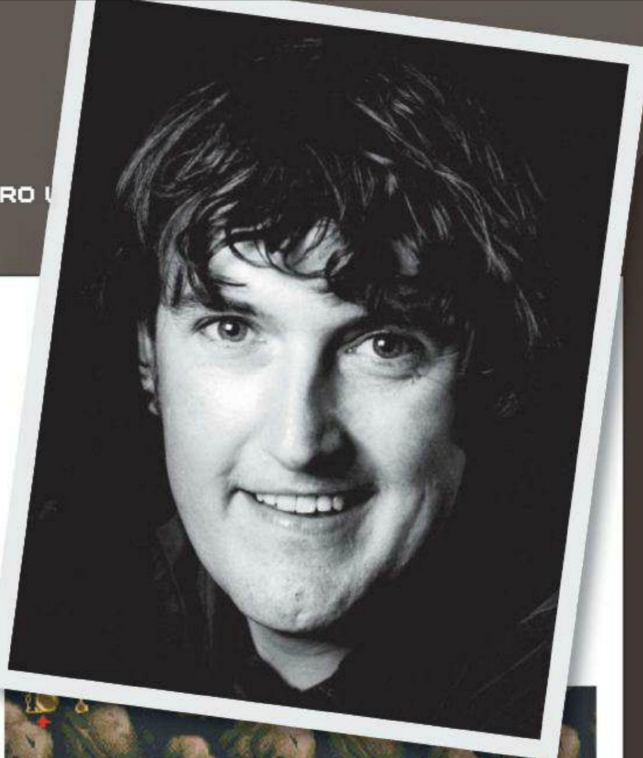
Three of history's greatest things collide – *Transformers*, Game Boys, and coasters. The notion of a transformer that can readjust its parts to become a games console is so awesomely brilliant that we're surprised Hasbro hadn't thought of it. The robot could keep all the Decepticons busy with the latest games, while Prime and the others Autobots corner Megatron down a dark alley and feed him a deadly throat lozenge.

Mushroom T-shirt

- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

We love this twist on the famous 'makes you stronger' saying because…well, we shouldn't need to spell it out. Actually, as we have space to fill, we will anyway. You see, if Mario eats a red mushroom he grows in size. If he gets struck by an enemy while in his full-size form he shrinks back to normal small size. If he sustains a hit in his diminutive state he dies. Therefore, what doesn't… you get the idea.





A MOMENT WITH...

Andy Wear

When Andy Wear stares into the distance and talks wistfully about his memories of Nam - Nam Rood, that is...

Who is Andy Wear?

With a skinhead, a sneer, and a habit of calling the viewers "slimy furtlers", Nam Rood (doorman backwards) was not the usual kind of presenter on kids TV in the Nineties. Nam, played by Emmerdale actor Andy Wear, was the resident cheats expert in the first three series of ITV's *Bad Influence* gaming show from 1992-1994.

How did you get chosen for the role of Nam Rood?
I was one of many people who auditioned for it. We had to do a test in front of the producer and casting director. I owned a ZX Spectrum at the time and was keen on the odd game of *Manic Miner*, but I wasn't a proper gamer. So before the audition I bought as many gaming mags as I could find to help prepare.

How did the character of Nam develop?
It was mainly down to the producer of *Bad Influence*, a guy called Patrick Titley. He came up with the initial idea for this strange snarling oddball who lived in a shed. He was the brains behind it and wrote the scripts, including all of the bizarre 'scrotty furtler' type phrases.

It was tightly scripted, but I did have chance to tweak things in rehearsals. A big influence for me was *The Young Ones* and the anarchic spirit of Rick Mayall; something Patrick picked up on.

The one aspect I did have control over was Nam's look. That severe haircut just seemed right for the character, and his dodgy clothes, they were all my own.

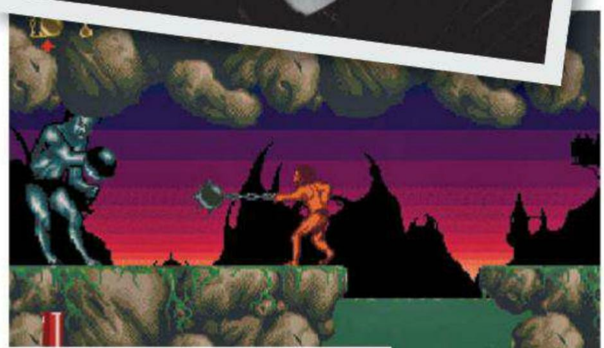
What was filming like?
It was filmed at Yorkshire Television in Leeds. I would film all of my sketches in the morning and then the main programme was recorded afterwards. It was usually filmed on a Wednesday and then shown the following day.

Nam was such a liberating character to play. Generally as a TV actor you avoid looking into the camera but Nam would stare right down into the lens. So filming those sequences often turned into a strange kind of dance with my cameraman, Les Flannigan.

The one major headache was having to learn those cheat codes. Nightmare. It was like studying for an exam – and as soon as I'd managed to cram one into my head, I had to erase it to make room for the next.

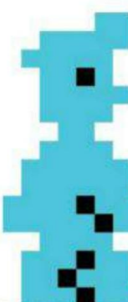
When you demonstrated the cheats – was it done for real?
Yes, despite what people think – there were no mock-ups. The cheats were sent directly from the games companies, so they were pretty much guaranteed to work. There was a team of techy types behind the scenes who made sure each one worked in the rehearsal. But when Nam demonstrated them – that was all done for real.

Did you get recognised in the streets?
I did get a fair amount of attention at the time. I would often find myself being followed by a trail of young gamers, but it was always positive. Though I remember one kid asking me if I knew any cheats for a cash machine.



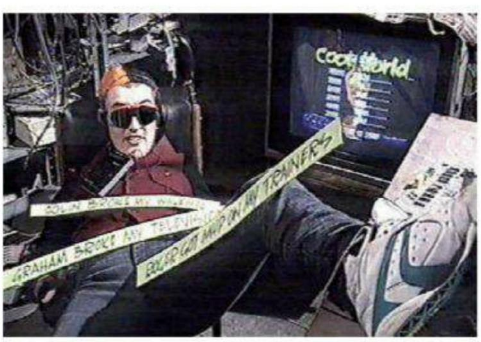
» [Amiga] Typing in "TEN PINTS" was the boozy secret to invincibility revealed by Nam for *Shadow of the Beast II* on the Amiga.

> "A big influence for me was *The Young Ones*, and the anarchic spirit of Rick Mayall"



How did you get on with the other presenters; Andy Crane and Violet Berlin?
Smashing, we were a little team. I think the fact we genuinely liked working together helped make the show. Andy was a top class presenter and Violet was just this powerhouse of enthusiasm.

How did you feel about Nam being dropped for the fourth series?
It goes with the territory when you're an actor. I had a polite phone call from Patrick to say he wasn't going to be used. Apparently there were some rumblings about the character not helping to attract female viewers. I was sad to leave but I was proud of the character I'd helped bring to life. I enjoyed every second of my time as a furtler. *





30 March – 26 April

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



31 March 2006
OutRun 2006: Coast To Coast is released by Sega on the PS2 and Xbox. Oh. how we love a Magical Sound Shower…



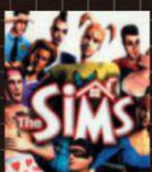
31 March 2011
■ The latest instalment of Square Enix's MMORPG *Final Fantasy XIV* is released on the PlayStation 3.



1 April 1984
■ Amsoft and Software Projects create *Jet Set Roland*, which used Amsoft's mascot in Matthew Smith's hit game. It was never released.

SQUARE ENIX.

1 April 2003
■ Enix Corporation and Square Co. officially merge to form Square Enix.



4 April 2003
■ *The Sims*, the life simulation videogame by Maxis, is released on both Xbox and GameCube in Europe.



4 April 1967
■ David Perry, videogame developer and founder of Shiny Entertainment, is born in Lisburn.



2 April 2004
■ Are you in the market for a ropey Pokémon game? Good news – *Pokémon Channel* is released in the UK on GameCube.

18
www.pegi.info

1 April 2003
■ PEGI (Pan European Game Information) is launched, a rating system for assessing videogame content and age restrictions.



6 April 2001
■ Rare's action platform game, *Conkers Bad Fur Day*, is released on the N64.



7 April 1986
■ *Cyberun*, arguably Ultimate Play The Game's most difficult game, is released on the Spectrum and later the MSX.



12 April 1999
■ *Rollercoaster Tycoon* is released in Europe on PC.



15 April 1995
■ Acclaim's third *Mortal Kombat* game is released into arcades. It also introduced us to the ludicrous "animalities" finishing move.



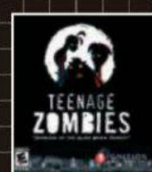
17 April 2003
■ Sideburns and Adamantium skeleton at the ready, as Activision release *Wolverine's Revenge* in Europe on virtually anything with a plug.



16 April 2004
■ Cowabunga dude! Konami's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* game is released on the PS2 and Xbox in the UK.



15 April 2009
■ *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust* is released on the PS3 across Europe, the first Larry game on the new console gen.



15 April 2008
■ *Teenage Zombies: Invasion Of The Alien Brain Thingys* is released on the Nintendo DS. Best part of the game? Sadly, the title.



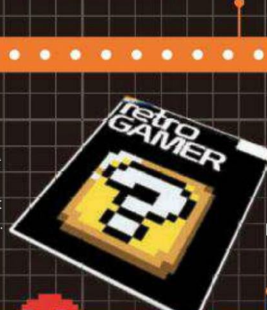
23 April 1982
■ The Sinclair ZX Spectrum was born, making it thirty years old this year. Happy Thirtieth Birthday!



23 April 1995
■ You want a satellite modem for downloading games to your Super Famicom? You're in luck – the Satellaview is released.



24 April 2012
■ Capcom unleashes *Resident Evil: Raccoon City*. Trigger fingers start itching everywhere.



26 April 2012
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets

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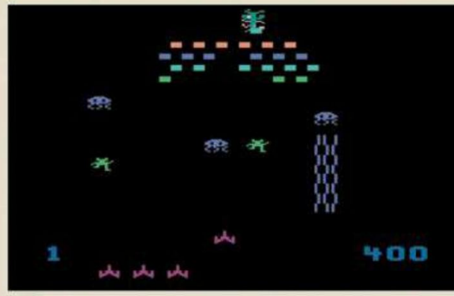
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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



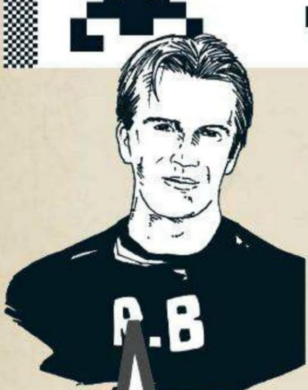
» [ZX81] Bug Byte release the fantastic *Mazogs* and a huge hit ensues. It's later converted to the Spectrum and renamed *Maziacs*.



» [Atari 2600] Despite a B-movie title, this was a playable *Space Invaders* clone released for the Supercharger add-on.







THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1982

JUNE 1982 – Intellivision finds its Intellivoice, 2600 gets Supercharged, Spectrum gets recalled, ZX81 Galaxians Scramble for Mazogs, Commodore have rats on their radar whilst Atari have Commodore's Jelly Monsters on theirs.

Despite having been around since 1980, and having almost two million consoles in circulation, Mattel's Intellivision software support was mainly sourced from its own software development group. Things were beginning to change with news that Activision, who primarily supported the Atari 2600, announced they would begin developing for the Intellivision with conversions of the forthcoming *Stampede* and *Pitfall!*, with *River Raid* to follow later in the year.

It was a much-needed injection of optimism for the aging console, particularly with new systems regularly being released. The ColecoVision, due out in August, posed the biggest threat. Maybe with this in mind, Mattel revealed a new peripheral for their machine, the Intellivoice. As the name suggests, it was a voice synthesis module that incorporated speech into games. Speech in games was usually there for decoration and little else, but the Intellivoice promised that speech in their specifically written Intellivoice games would be integral to the game-play.

Sadly for Mattel the module flopped badly. Despite some promising pre-order figures from distributors, Intellivoice software dried up extremely quickly when modules didn't begin to sell. In total only four games were released for the module; the first being *Space Spartans*, a *Star Raiders*-style game, and the last was *Tron: Solar Sailer* based on Disney's movie. Solar Sailer was an absolute stinker of a game.

Another console add-on due out was Starpath Corporation's Supercharger for the Atari 2600. The ingenious peripheral plugged in the cartridge slot of the 2600, bumping the RAM from just 128 bytes to just over 6K, giving developers the opportunity to make bigger games with higher resolution graphics. Atari 2600 games for the Supercharger also differed in that they were on cassette with games loaded, computer-style, via a cable from the expansion module connected to a standard cassette player. Being on cassette also meant that Supercharger games would be approximately half the cost of their cartridge counterparts.

Once again, software support was poor and despite the Supercharger receiving great reviews, sales were hugely disappointing. Only twelve games ever made it to retail, including the pack-in game of *Phaser Patrol*, a very playable *Star Raiders* clone. Two more games were pencilled in for imminent release; *Communist Mutants From Space* and *Dragonstomper*. The politically inspired scaremongering of *Communist Mutants* turned out to be an excellent *Space Invaders* clone, however it was *Dragonstomper* that proved to be the real gem. It was arguably the first proper RPG game released on a console and was a must-play game. That is, if you could actually find a copy.

Sinclair unveiled the Spectrum in April, but they were having problems getting the machines out. Production was halted after finding a fault in the first production run, meaning over 17,000 customer orders had

JUNE 1982 NEWS

14 June saw a ceasefire agreed by British and Argentine forces after a ten-week war for the Falkland Islands, which began on 2 April. 3000 Argentine troops invaded after General Galtieri, the head of Argentina's military, stated they had been left with no other option than military action after months of arguments over the sovereignty of the islands.

The Argentine forces took control of the islands and raised the Argentine flag. Several bloody sea and land-based battles followed as the UK retaliated. Argentine forces finally surrendered on 14 June with hostilities officially ending on 20 June.

to be postponed. A circuit design problem caused a clash between the ULA and the Z80A, resulting in all machines having to be recalled.

The ZX81, under threat from its newer, bigger brother, was seemingly going from strength to strength. Sinclair Research revealed that they were planning to produce 60,000 ZX81 machines a month, with a target of 150,000 a month around the Christmas period.

It was interesting to speculate on whether those numbers would be scaled down dramatically, once the Spectrum started to become widely available with software to back it up. Either way, software houses were just happy to be making games for any sort of Sinclair machine, as proved by several splendid ZX81 arcade releases this month. Artic Computing released *Galaxians*, a very commendable attempt at recreating the arcade game, complete with swooping aliens. Granted, the graphics weren't going to blow your socks off but it played very well indeed.

Bug Byte also had a new game out for the ZX81. *Mazogs* was an arcade adventure maze game that Bug Byte advertised as having the most amazing graphics seen on a ZX81. The graphics were very good but the atmosphere created by being stuck in a maze and having the monstrous *Mazogs* relentlessly pursue you was excellent. It became one of the most popular ZX81 games of the time, and such was its success that it was quickly converted to the Spectrum.

In between making converter boards and joysticks for the ZX81, Mikro-Gen were also producing a range of games for the computer. Their newest offering was a version of *Scramble*. The graphics were functional rather than aesthetically pleasing, but they did the job adequately, and allowed the game-play to shine through.

Commodore VIC-20 owners had a frenetic maze game of their own released this month. *Radar Rat Race* by Commodore was a cartridge game that saw you play a rat running through a maze collecting cheese whilst avoiding cats and other rats. It was unashamedly a clone of Namco's *Rally-X* but was just as playable.

Another cartridge release by Commodore was their take on *Pac-Man*, *Jelly Monsters*. It was an excellent clone, but soon became the focus of Atari and its lawyers. As such, *Jelly Monsters* had a very limited retail lifespan as Atari pushed for it to be removed from sale or incur the wrath of their legal department.

The contentious software release of the month was one of Llamasoft's first offerings. Having just been formed and requiring software to release, Jeff Minter created a simple clone of a game called *City Bomber* for the VIC-20. Bearing in mind that the Falkland Islands conflict was still underway, Yak called his new game *Bomb Buenos Aires*. It played *Rule Britannia* and featured little Argentine flags on the buildings with the advert stating, "Flatten the Argentine capital with your Vulcan bomber." After some bad press and newspaper coverage regarding the game, the Hairy One re-issued the game, renaming it *Blitzkrieg*.



»The ColecoVision was coming soon and gunning for Mattel's Intellivision…

21 June saw the birth of Prince Charles and Lady Diana's first child. The baby boy was born at St Mary's Hospital in London, weighing in at just over 7lbs. He became second in the line to the throne, and it was confirmed that he would be named William Arthur Philip Louis.

The kick-off of the 12th FIFA World Cup in Spain was on 13 June. Both England and Argentina qualified for the second phase group stages luckily avoiding each other. England were eliminated despite not losing a game and conceding only one goal in the whole tournament. The final was eventually between Italy and Germany, who were beaten 3-1.

June also saw the release of Steven Spielberg's E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial. The massively successful film starred Henry Thomas and a young Drew Barrymore. It went on to gross over $792 million.



»To celebrate its thirtieth anniversary, Steven Spielberg's huge hit will be appearing on Blu-Ray.

THIS MONTH IN…

YOUR COMPUTER



Something newer generations missed out on were the upgrades to kit computers. Keyboards for the ZX80/81 were everywhere and *YC* reviewed a whole heap of them, laid out for your delectation like a bunch of East European Spectrum clones.



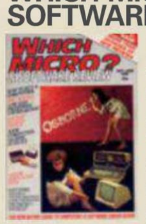
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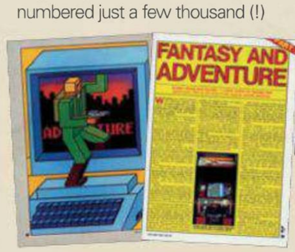
C&VG took a look at the latest arcade offerings for those with an abundance of 10p pieces. Arriving in the UK was the marvellous *Dig Dug* from Atari, the even more marvellous *Robotron 2084* from Williams Electronics and the forgettable *Turpin* by Konami.



WHICH MICRO & SOFTWARE REVIEW



Which Micro analysed what makes a good game. Conclusion? Variety is great. Gah! They also highlighted the growing problem of gaming addicts, which in 1982 numbered just a few thousand (!)



CHARTS

JUNE 1982



ZX81

1. Football Manager (Addictive Games)
2. 3D Monster Maze (J K Greye)
3. Mazogs (Bug Byte)
4. Centipede (DK'Tronics)
5. ZX Zombies (Silversoft)



ACORN ATOM

1. Astrobirds (Program Power)
2. Invader Force (Program Power)
3. Star Trek (Bug Byte)
4. Adventure (Program Power)
5. 747 Flight Simulation (Bug Byte)

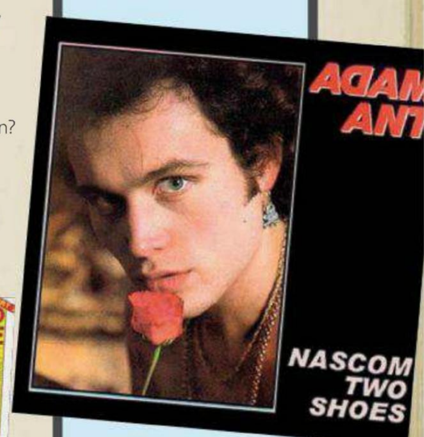


ATARI 2600

1. Pac-Man (Atari)
2. Asteroids (Atari)
3. Missile Command (Atari)
4. Yar's Revenge (Atari)
5. Kaboom! (Activision)

MUSIC

1. Goody Two Shoes (Adam Ant)
2. I've Never Been To Me (Charlene)
3. Torch (Soft Cell)
4. Hungry Like The Wolf (Duran Duran)
5. House Of Fun (Madness)



BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Mega Drive] *Animaniacs* the game was as entertaining as *Animaniacs* the cartoon despite an alarming lack of Pinky and the Brain.

CHARTS

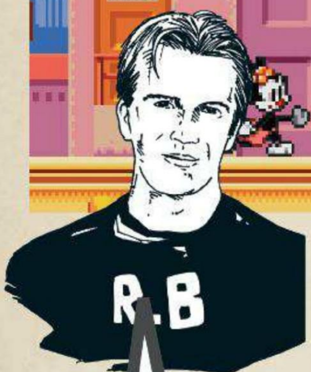
DECEMBER 1994



PC	
1	Colonization (MicroProse)
2	Doom 2 (Virgin Games)
3	System Shock (Origin Systems)
4	Doom (ID Software)
5	Space Simulator (Microsoft)

» [Sega 32X] There is a disturbance in the Force. That'll be the money men at Sega crying at their bottom line for 32X sales…





THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 1994

DECEMBER 1994 – PlayStation arrives, Virtual Boy promised, Ocean Software go French, Smurfs and Animaniacs do battle, Virtua Fighter 2 hits arcades whilst Star Wars tries to save Sega's 32X. Richard Burton plays tuba in the Max Rebo band.

After a long wait, Sony's PlayStation was finally here. Well, actually over there, as it was released in Japan first on 3 December. The UK would have to wait a tantalising nine more months. Still, be grateful it happened at all!

You see, Sony and Nintendo had a partnership dating back to 1986 – where the initial ideas of the PlayStation took root – and the Consumer Electronics Show of June 1991 was supposed to see Sony's CD-ROM drive incorporated into Nintendo's Super Nintendo. So Sony displayed their prototype system and contentedly waited for Nintendo to formally announce their partnership at the show. But Nintendo shocked everyone, including Sony, by publicly ditching them in favour of rival CD-ROM developer Philips.

Sony decided it therefore needed to develop a console of its own to give Nintendo some unexpected competition. Sony targeted a wider audience than the usual gaming demographic, and as CD-based consoles were in the ascendency and cartridge-based systems began to fade, Sony's excellent marketing plan helped make them the new dominant force in videogames, leaving Nintendo to rue their original decision.

While PlayStation was hogging the console limelight, Nintendo broke the news of its own console's release. Nintendo had already indicated a new console was coming: the Ultra 64/N64, but what people hadn't accounted for was Nintendo unveiling a "virtual reality" console. This was initially named the VR32, and later renamed the Virtual Boy. Gamers cooed at the possibility of 3D virtual reality gaming, a headset to wear and *Mario* worlds to explore like never before. Unfortunately their virtual reality was nothing like the actual reality when the Virtual Boy was previewed a few weeks later.

It was released in Japan in July 95, and the surprise and wonder was soon replaced with frustration and disappointment at its headache-inducing and primitive-looking red and black graphics. These weren't the 3D worlds expected; it was more like strapping two Vectrex systems to your eyes and blinking really quickly. This disappointment in the console led to very low sales, and with minimal software support, the Virtual Boy was discontinued less than six months after release.

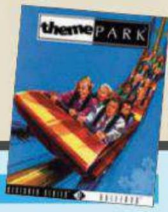
One of Britain's biggest and most beloved software houses, Ocean Software, had just become a little bit French. The French conglomerate Chargeurs, who also had several other entertainment interests including film production and satellite television, had acquired approximately 24% of Ocean.

Ocean stated that the links with its new partner would open doors to other forms of entertainment, while giving them the cash injection to pursue new projects which required considerable funding. It all sounded like good times for Ocean, but under a year and a half later they had been bought by another French giant, Infogrames Entertainment, for a reported $100 million. A further two years on and Ocean was renamed Infogrames UK, bringing to an end the famous Ocean Software name.

Over the following years Infogrames absorbed several other famous names from the early Eighties, including Gremlin



» [Arcade] *Virtua Fighter 2* arrives in arcades. Polygons have been smoothed to stop characters looking like they're made from Lego.


SNES	
1	Stunt Race FX (Nintendo)
2	Mortal Kombat II (Acclaim)
3	Super Mario World (Nintendo)
4	Starwing (Nintendo)
5	Jurassic Park (Ocean)

AMIGA	
1	Theme Park (Electronic Arts)
2	UFO (MicroProse)
3	Super Stardust (Team 17)
4	Club Football: The Manager (Bombs Computer Games)
5	On The Ball (Ascon Software)

MUSIC	
1	Stay Another Day (East 17)
2	All I Want For Christmas Is You (Mariah Carey)
3	Love Me For A Reason (Boyzone)
4	Crocodile Shoes (Jimmy Nail)
5	Let Me Be Your Fantasy (Baby D)

Interactive (formerly Gremlin Graphics) and Beam Software. Through buying Hasbro Interactive it also acquired the names of MicroProse and Atari. When Infogrames weren't planning world domination, they occasionally found time to release a game. Their newest tempter was a game based on the *Smurfs*. This SNES and Mega Drive game was as formulaic as they come, being a bog standard scrolling platformer. Pleasant graphics helped but the game, which was presumably targeting the younger generations of gamers, was oddly rather difficult to play.

Another cartoon getting the gaming conversion treatment was the *Animaniacs* from Warner Brothers. Konami took on the challenge of creating a Mega Drive game that would keep the stylised graphics, the in-jokes and the slightly anarchic flavour of the cartoon series, and came up with a platform puzzler that hit the mark.

Utilising all three of the *Animaniacs* characters – Wakko, Yakko and Dot – in a similar way to *The Lost Vikings*, the character-switching element raised what could have been another anonymous platform game into something more substantial. Strangely Konami released two different versions of *Animaniacs,* with the SNES version following a different storyline but maintaining the platform puzzle and character switching features.

Newly unveiled in arcades was *Virtua Fighter 2*, and thanks to Sega, Yu Suzuki and the AM2, the follow-up to the polygon-encrusted beat-em-up original. For its second outing the graphics were enhanced with some fantastically detailed backgrounds and the characters having their old square edges rounded off and skin textures added for a more realistic appearance. *Virtua Fighter 2* proved to be a success in the arcades and was later ported to Sega's newest console, the Saturn, before undergoing a transfer to the Mega Drive and PC.

Another Sega release this month was *Star Wars Arcade*, one of the first titles for the new and much maligned 32X add-on. With such a prestigious license to launch the system, it was hoped that *Star Wars* would boost sales and help the 32X to a firm footing, particularly after gamers had walked away from the Sega Mega-CD.

Sure enough, sluggish 32X sales were boosted by the *Star Wars* game, piquing the interest of gamers enough for it to survive a little longer. *Star Wars Arcade* was a more than adequate rendition of the arcade game and one of the best on the Sega 32X, though that was hardly a difficult feat given the other choices available.

Finally, a new multi-format console magazine made its way onto newsagent's shelves. *Ultimate Future Games* was Future Publishing's latest periodical and covered the new generations of consoles including the Atari Jaguar, Neo Geo and Mega 32X. No room for any of your computer nonsense here.

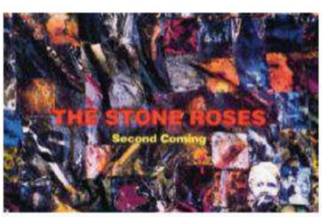


» It looks like a Tomytronic 3D handheld game from the early Eighties. Sadly the Virtual Boy games weren't much better.


» [SNES] The perennial stag night fancy dress favourite in videogame form.

DECEMBER 1994 NEWS

23 December saw the death of British actor Sebastian Shaw, aged 89. Although not an instantly recognisable name Shaw had a distinguished career spanning over 60 years and was also a playwright, poet and stage actor. He was particularly well known for his Shakespearian performances. Despite this, Sebastian Shaw would be remembered by most for a small two minute scene in *Return Of The Jedi*, the third film in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, in which he played Anakin Skywalker, the unmasked and dying Darth Vader. He would also appear at the end of the film as Anakin's ghost but was subsequently removed for continuity with the new *Star Wars* prequels.



» It took five and a half years to make, but *Second Coming* failed to get to the top of the album charts.

On 5 December, two hotly anticipated music albums were released: *Second Coming* by The Stone Roses and the CD/cassette release of *Vitalogy* by Pearl Jam. The weight of expectation for The Stone Roses' second album five and a half years after their massively successful debut album seemed to disappoint critics and fans, despite it reaching number 4 in the UK album charts. Meanwhile, American grunge rockers Pearl Jam and their *Vitalogy* album was receiving terrific reviews and in its first week of release it sold over 875,000 copies.

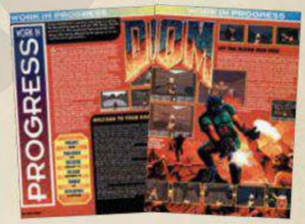
6 December saw the world premiere of the movie *Dumb And Dumber* starring Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels as a pair of buffoons on a road trip to deliver a case full of money to its pretty lady owner. Love and fart gags follow aplenty.

THIS MONTH IN...

MEAN MACHINES SEGA



The recently released 32X desperately needed a must-have game. *MM* previewed the FPS classic *Doom* and although it showed potential, the PC version had several more levels than the Sega 32X version.



SUPER PLAY



Super Play reviewed Argonaut Software's *Vortex* for the SNES and thought it great fun. Despite only being a 4 Meg cartridge and the last game to use the first Super FX chip, this shoot-em-up was something to persevere with.



AMSTRAD ACTION



Amstrad Action's resident fanzine expert **RG**'s David Crookes, took a look at the latest fanzines; *Amszine, Tribal Mag* and *Krash*, as well as at the CPC's most famous fanzine, *WACCI*. Weirdly, all these fanzines had more pages and content than *AA* did.

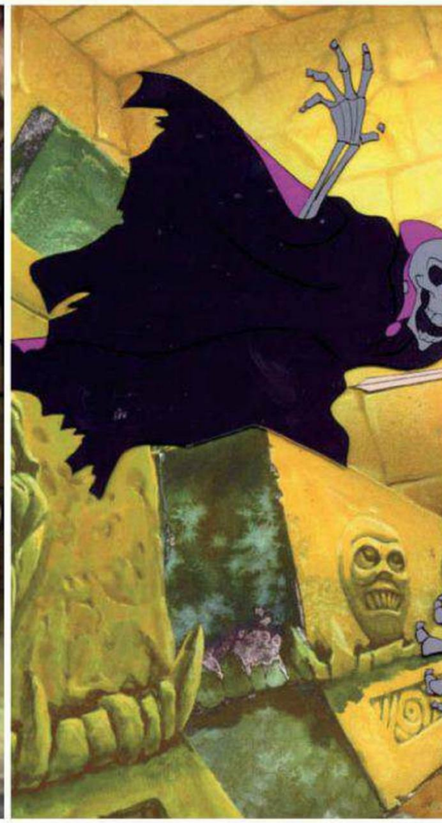


retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

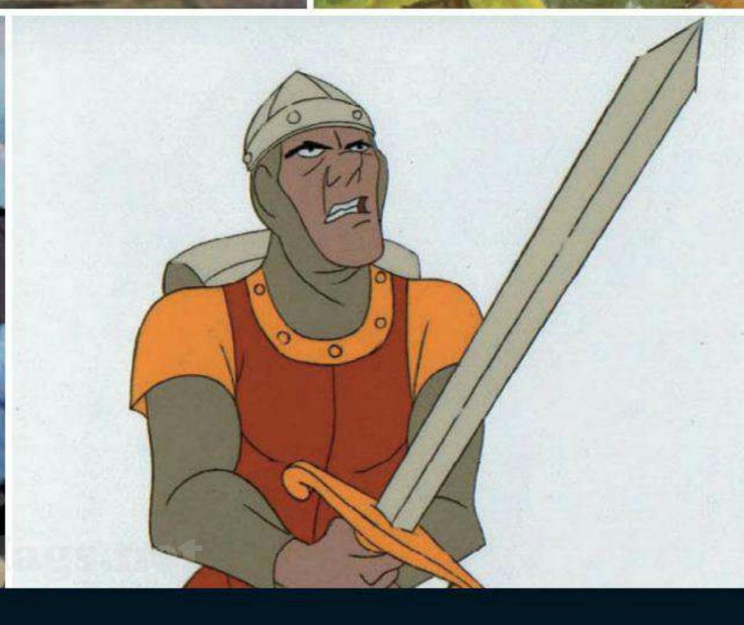










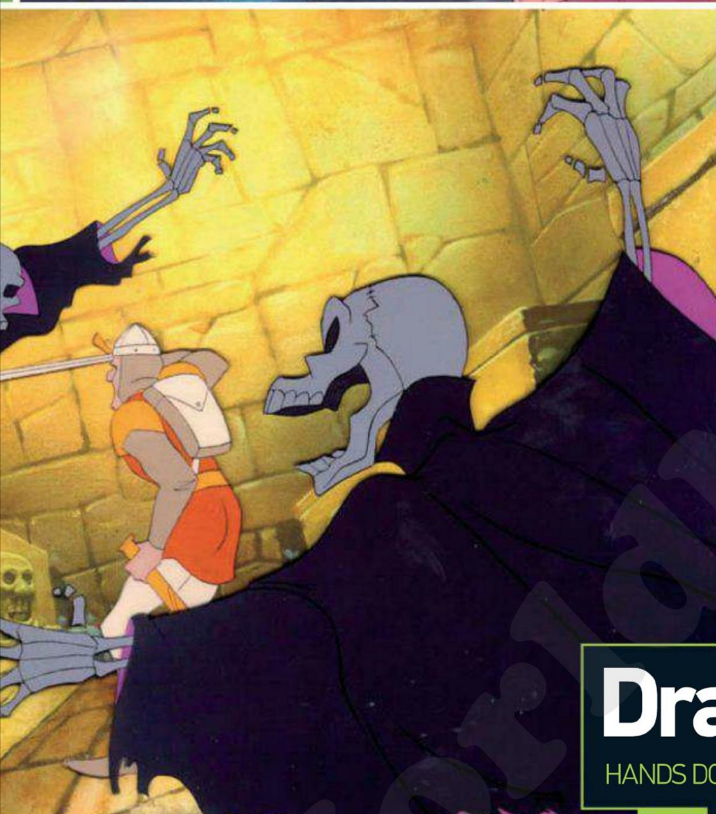






RETROBATE PROFILE

» NAME: PAUL ROBINSON
» JOINED: 28TH DECEMBER 2011
» LOCATION: THETFORD
» OCCUPATION: NOT GIVEN
» FAVE GAME SYSTEM: COMMODORE 64





Dragon's Lair

HANDS DOWN, THE BEST LOOKING GAME OF 1983

#48





» ARCADE
» ADVANCE MICROCOMPUTER SYSTEMS
» 1983

I thought long and hard about what game to cover on my first review for Retro Gamer. Eventually I decided to go with the mighty Dragon's Lair. It was the game I obsessed most over in the early 90s, and I opted for the Mega CD version over all the others. This was the first full version of the game you could play at home (at least the first available on any system I owned) and prior to this, home editions were heavily edited due to system limitations.

The game's story is pretty standard for the time and sees a brave warrior out to rescue a beautiful princess from the clutches of the forces of evil, portrayed in this case by an evil sentient Dragon named Singe and his dark minions.

The game itself was pretty much a Marmite affair. Was it an interactive cartoon? An adventure game? A puzzler? Whatever the genre, it was clear that it wasn't everyone's cup of tea. In fact, 9/10 people seemed to hate playing it. Most enjoyment was had by people simply watching it - I made up that 1/10 of the people who loved playing it.

The controls were simple. Move the joystick/pad in the correct direction at the right time on each scene to advance in the game. One false move and you died. The death scenes were the most viewed scenes in the entire game, that's a guarantee!

The Mega CD had it all there. The entire arcade story all on one CD. Unfortunately, the graphics weren't the best of the home system versions at the time. The Amiga beat it hands down. The Mega CD's version was grainy and bland to look at. Fortunately, the gameplay was very good, trying to stick to the cartoon style of the game.

People always pointed out the game never had "playability". But that is like saying a platform game had no playability because you hated platform games. People who hated these types of games just seem to be plentiful in number, that's all. Overall, this game has aged badly, but I have fond memories of it.



RE-EDUCATING THE MASSES



30 YEARS AGO THE BBC MICRO BEGAN TO SNEAK INTO HOMES AND SCHOOLS UNDER THE GUISE OF AN EDUCATIONAL COMPUTER. IT WAS ALSO GREAT FOR GAMES, AND WE'RE GOING TO TELL YOU EXACTLY WHY. NOW PAY ATTENTION, CLASS...

The BBC Micro played an important educational role in schools, in addition to preparing the British population for the computing revolution that now makes up a large part of our daily lives. However, it was also a kick-arse games machine, thanks to its fast processor, colourful graphics and decent sound. It also came with an excellent library of games, but the fact that it was a common sight in every British school both worked for it and against it. On the one hand, it created a certain stigma around the machine as a "school computer". On the other hand, the education contract ensured that it was a machine with a future. What we're determined to do is bust the myth that it's not a great games machine.

The Early Games

As home computers of the time had a habit of disappearing within months of being launched, Acorn Computers set up its own software publishing branch called Acornsoft. This was a shrewd manoeuvre on Acorn's part, as it ensured that the Atom, and later, the BBC Micro, had a head start in comparison to other platforms. Jonathan Griffiths was one of the people who first worked on some of the games available for the home computer system. Although relatively early releases in the Beeb's lifespan, the conversions that

Jonathan and his colleagues released are often cited as some of the best and most faithful unofficial coin-op clones on an 8-bit home computer. They certainly set a high standard for others to follow.

"We were given free rein to write whatever games we thought of, but we thought we could do a pretty good job of converting the games we played in the pubs to run on the Beeb," says Jonathan, fondly. "Tim Dobson saw *Space Panic* and wrote *Monsters*. Neil Raine was a great *Defender* fan, so wrote *Planetoid* and I liked *Pac-Man*, so wrote *Snapper*, and then later I copied *Scramble* to make *Rocket Raid*. The *Snapper* name did have a precedent, since Hugo Tyson had earlier written a version of *Pac-Man* for the Atom and called it *Snapper*."

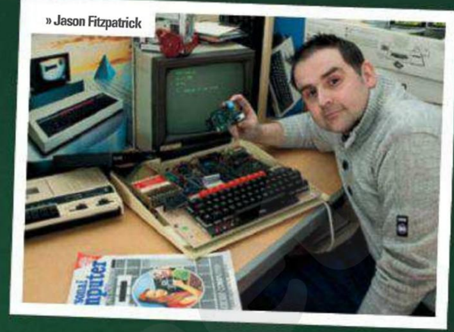
It seems that, as well as having direct access to the Acorn technicians, Jonathan and his associates helped each other when getting to grips with the new hardware. "We started by writing some graphics routines to let us draw sprites on the screen. We wrote these routines together and copied from each other's improvements, including writing a sprite editor. We then wrote our games in parallel, again, helping each other as we went along."

The BBC's bright graphics display was based on primary colours and would later, arguably, work against the machine, but for the purposes of these early coin-op clone releases, it was very close match. The sound chip of the BBC, while not quite as good as the SID chip in a Commodore 64, was a good copy for that era of coin-op, and the fast processor kept the action silky smooth. The ports were good, a little too good, and before long Namco was banging on the door.

"I didn't notice much of the politics at the time – I was only 19 in 1982. I remember David Johnson-Davies calling us into his office to say that we had to change a few graphics and some names. We originally called Neil's *Defender* clone *Defender*, but then changed it to *Planetoid*. And [for the *Pac-Man* clone] I came up with some different shapes for the snapper and the ghosts."

Jonathan also worked on some original games for Acornsoft such as *JCB Digger*. No trademark infringement in this case as the game was commissioned by JCB to be a promotional tool to sit alongside the die-cast models it had commissioned. JCB had stipulated that the digger mustn't be destroyed or shown to fail in any way, and for that reason, when captured, the player is dragged off and an enemy steals the digger. However, Jonathan had not yet mastered smooth scrolling on the BBC Micro, admittedly a weakness of the architecture, and this

» Jason Fitzpatrick



"We were given free rein to write whatever games we thought of"



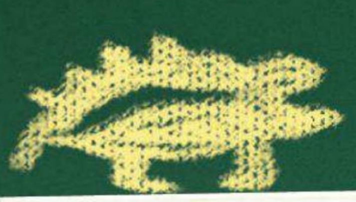
» Richard Hanson, founder of Superior Software

» Johnathan Grifiths, Acornsoft programmer

» Simon Storr, *Citadel 2* developer

» Chris Payne, worked for Micro Power and Superior Software





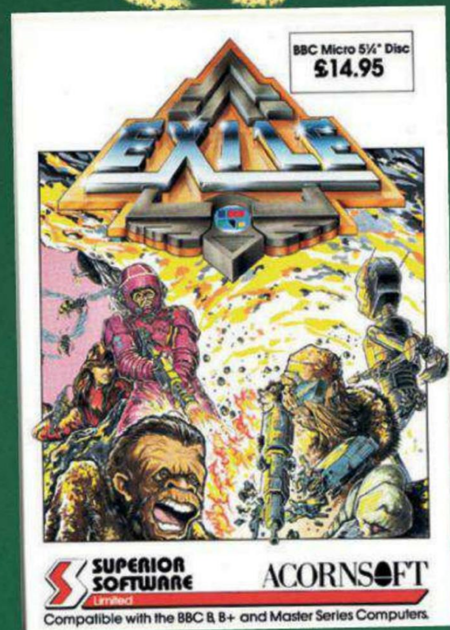
let down the game a bit. He recalls that a colleague once referred to the game as *JCB Judder*, and says "Even now I wince whenever I hear someone use the word 'judder'!" Eventually, programmers such as Orlando (creator of the vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-up *Firetrack*) later hit upon tricks to enable smooth vertical scrolling on the BBC Micro.

The games that Acornsoft created during the initial period of the BBC Micro's lifespan are some of the most highly regarded games on the system. Not only was *Starship Command* a great space shooter, but there were some excellent early text adventures created. Continuing the theme of arcade game clones, the *Meteors*-inspired *Asteroids* was a classy update that added colour, while *Crazy Tracer* was a good *Amidar* clone. The Acornsoft catalogue as a whole is largely a perfect snapshot of what early 8-bit home computing had to offer.

Although many of the Acornsoft games offer an excellent insight into the early period of the 8-bit scene, there are also a few games that serve as indicators of what was to come. It's humbling to consider that it's the place where Geoff Crammond published his first racing simulator, *Revs*, alongside an early and impressive flight simulator called *Aviator*. These are two games that wowed people because they really played to one of the BBC Micro's strengths: a fast CPU. This could deliver smooth 3D graphics, as well as a more sophisticated physics engine than other platforms. Crammond would later go on to develop The Sentinel, another BBC Micro original. In addition, Acornsoft was also the starting point of a very famous game indeed: the very popular *Elite*.

On Being Elite

Acornsoft was the starting place of one of the most famous British games developers, *Elite* co-author, David Braben. A University student at the time, he was part of the wave of young people who were entranced by computers and the possibilities that they offered. "I was fascinated by how computers worked, even before I had a computer," says David. "I suppose it's because it felt like I could do amazing things on it. One of the early programs I saw in the manual for the Acorn Atom was a simple ten or twelve line 'animal learning' program, which essentially built a simple tree-structured database of questions and answers beginning with 'Think of an animal.' It showed that such a simple



» *Exile*, disk version. Chris Payne was a driving force behind this more exciting style of packaging.

5 Key Coin-Op Clones



Snapper (Pac-Man)

Publisher: Acornsoft
Year: 1982
One of the Acornsoft coin-op clones that was too close to the original for comfort. There is an earlier version with the chomping mouth main character, but this was withdrawn while the game was given a slight visual redesign for obvious legal reasons.

Planetoid (Defender)

Publisher: Acornsoft
Year: 1982
Copies the gameplay of the arcade in a smooth and fast rendition. The BBC Micro had no limitations where colour was used, and the eight-colour mode was made for these early arcade conversions. Rescue the humans from aliens; like the original, it's rock hard.





Bumble Bee (Ladybug)

Publisher: Micro Power
Year: 1983?
Frankly, it looks a bit rough compared to the coin-op that inspired it, but *Bumble Bee* had great gameplay. Obviously, the game itself took a strong influence from *Pac-Man*, with maze-hopping, pill-popping and meanie-avoiding action to be had.

Killer Gorilla (Donkey Kong)

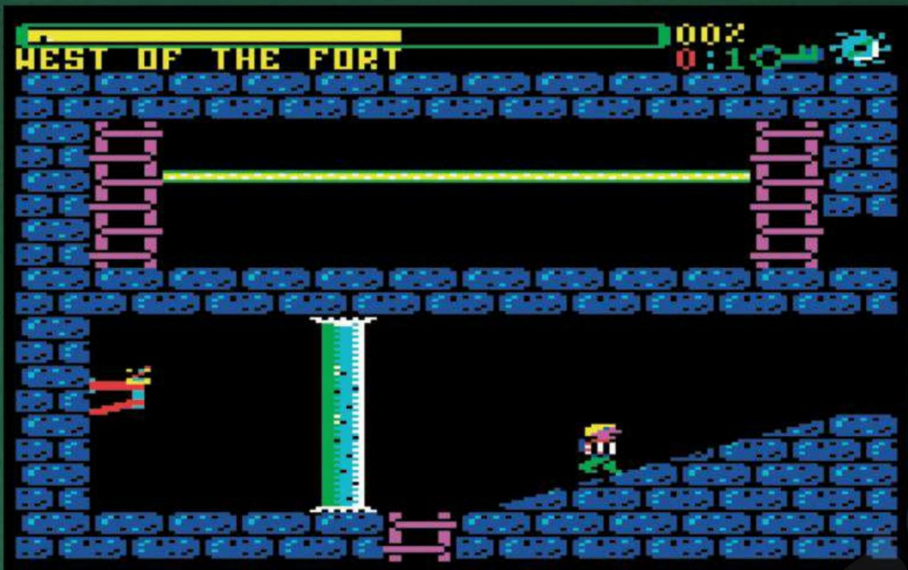
Publisher: Micro Power
Year: 1983
An early effort from Adrian Stephens (*Vigilante 8*). The character is no longer our favourite Italian plumber, but this is otherwise a decent stab at *Donkey Kong*. The graphics are colourful and the sound is authentically parent-annoyingly arcade-like.





Cybertron Mission (Bezerk)

Publisher: Micro Power
Year: 1983
A bit more colourful than the 1980 arcade original and more forgiving in terms of difficulty. The enemies are easier to kill and less vicious, in a smaller play area that doesn't allow the same tactics as the original.



and understandable program could produce such richness of experience. I was hooked."

When he eventually got a BBC Micro, David was impressed by the quality of the programming environment, and says it was "one of the best assemblers I have ever used, and I have used many of them." He also points out that it was a physically robust machine, well suited to classroom use, though as a gamer, he liked *Starship Command, Revs, Castle Quest* and some of the coin-op

"The BBC Micro *Elite 2* bore no relation to the eventual *Elite 2* on Amiga, ST and PC, but some of the ideas and graphical techniques were there. I wrote a new renderer that was both much faster and took less memory (which was very frustrating, given the effort spent on optimising the code in the original *Elite*); the code was pretty advanced, but was very much hobbled by being on what by then felt like quite a restrictive platform."

We ask David for his overall opinion of the impact of the machine, and find out

"Elite itself took nearly two years to write… we certainly put quality over quantity"

conversions. On the negative side, David points out that, like all Acorn hardware, it was expensive, acknowledging that he also struggled to afford one initially.

Ironically, even though he is one of the most well known programmers to emerge from the BBC Micro scene, David only released one game on the platform. With Ian Bell (Bell had released an earlier Acornsoft game called *Freefall*), he worked on a BBC-bound follow up to *Elite*, but it was never completed. "I was at University at the time, but nevertheless Ian Bell and I went on to make many versions of *Elite* for different platforms (both directly, and using contractors); 17 at last count. Not sure if that counts as prolific, but remember *Elite* itself took nearly two years to write – a very big undertaking for the time – but you are right, we certainly put quality over quantity.

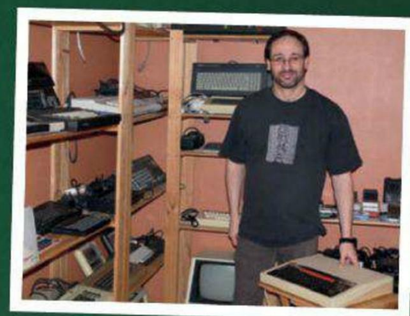
he's currently trying to create something similar with the Raspberry Pi, a low cost computer project. "The long term impact of the BBC Micro and the other machines of that time has been huge. It gave a large number of people a solid grounding in technology, and even those who didn't eventually follow it as a career benefited, but for those that did, and there were many, it changed their lives. This is not just people in the games industry, but in all sorts of technically oriented fields. It made a huge positive difference that the government was involved, not just because it gave it credibility with parents, but because it put such computers in every school, giving access to kids who would otherwise have missed out. In many cases machines were not just available in class, but in clubs at lunchtime and after school. It gave the UK a great

Reader Reactions



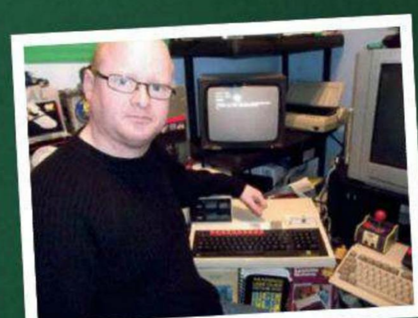
Simon Lyne (Eprom9)

"The BBC Micro is one of a kind, rivalling the PC in expandability; it is also historically significant as well as a very nicely designed machine."



Steve Benway (Benway68)

"I love the BBC Micro because new peripherals are still being manufactured to support it, and its games display a unique and very British character."



Stephen Twigg (RetroGamerVX)

"I love the BBC Micro because it bought a previously inaccessible technology into the education world, inspiring a whole new generation of programmers/technicians."



economic boost, even though many of these people later went on to live abroad. It is a tragic shame that subsequent governments didn't build on this great head start.

"With the BBC, if something went wrong, by a simple press of a button you could reset it. You couldn't mess it up in the same way you can 'brick' a modern phone. We are going for a similar quick restart philosophy with Raspberry Pi. This really encourages people to experiment."

Micro Power

Before Superior Software became the dominating publisher on the BBC Micro, Acornsoft had a rival. If you're familiar with the story behind other software companies that started in the North of England, the origins of Micro Power won't come as much of a surprise. It started off as a shop, based in Leeds, specialising in Acorn gear. Micro Power began publishing games for the Atom before moving on to the BBC Micro, initially under the Program Power banner. Initially, the focus was on making the games cheap, but that's not to say that they weren't good. Most of the games were well received, but like a lot of games at the time, they tended to be single-screen affairs that often riffed on the arcade standards of the day.

Marketing supremo Chris Payne met the owner Bob Simpson during the final year of his degree, at a time when Micro Power had become well established. Although he was taking Business Studies, he was also a home computer enthusiast, owning an Atari 800, and for this reason, he based his end of year project on the burgeoning games industry. Following an interview, Bob offered him a job on graduation. There's no doubt that Payne's choice of computer influenced his attitude.

Although technically and creatively Britain was holding its own, marketing and packaging were areas in which UK companies were miles behind. Most of the software for the Atari 800 came from the US, and the marketing side of things was slick. The early releases from Micro Power under the Program Power banner struck Chris as plain and unimaginative. "I hated it. The packaging was in full colour, but was poorly designed. Bob was very willing to give me the reins to do packaging with a graphical title laid over the airbrushed artwork as was common in the States," Chris tells us. So, did the UK companies of that era understand marketing?

"Most didn't," he revealed. "Imagine did and thrived. As did Ocean. Most publishers were first timers in any industry: this was their first business, so they had lots of teething pains. However, there was a lot of easy money in those days, so you didn't have to be a marketing expert to make a lot of money."

Chris told us that most of the games arrived in a nearly finished state, and surprisingly rather out of the blue. At the time the company had a few people employed full time to test the games that were submitted to them, as there were several of them. Adrian Stephens, who later went on to found his own company and develop games such as *Vigilante 8* and the *True Crime* series, was one of the people who brought in nearly complete games for assessment by the company. Adrian has always dismissed his early BBC games as either very basic or blatant rip-offs of coin-op games. In his defence, *Killer Gorilla* is a robust and still very playable *Donkey Kong* clone, while *Mr Ee* is a *Mr Do!* clone with excellent graphics and gameplay. Both games are recommended for those who are fans of the originals.

The later period of the company was marked by a change to the Micro Power moniker, along with a decision to concentrate on larger, higher quality games, and *Castle Quest* was one of the

"You couldn't mess up the BBC Micro in the same way you can 'brick' a modern phone"

» [BBC Micro] Precision jumping galore on *Ghouls*.





» [BBC Micro] *Palace Of Magic*, a *Citadel*-style arcade adventure.



» [BBC Micro] The bright palette really works for games like *Mr Ee*.

10 Exclusive Games

Citadel

Year: 1985
Publisher: Superior Software

One of the finest arcade adventures of the era, and consisting of about 240 screens, this game is huge. It is still completable, with a bit of luck and perhaps some paper and pencil notes. The first impression on the player has to be the eight colour graphics, followed by the realisation that no two rooms are alike, and touches such as the smooth platforming action surrounding the puzzles and a sense of exploration elevate this game to classic status.

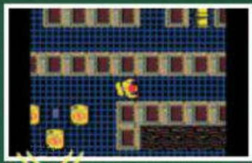


Codename: Droid

Year: 1987
Publisher: Superior Software

Trading some of the graphical splendour of its predecessor for extra smoothness, this follow up to *Stryker's Run* benefits from a more detailed world and better puzzles. On *Stryker*'s toughest mission yet, we guide our hero deeper and deeper into an enemy base, where there are lots of the not very bright guards we've come to expect. A bit of shooting, bit of platforming, bit of object manipulation.

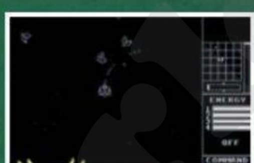




Pipeline

Year: 1988
Publisher: Superior Software

This one's a little bit cheating, as it's not quite an exclusive, thanks to Superior Software's own retro remakes. Superior made a lot of overhead-view scrolling maze games such as *Bonecruncher*, *Ravenskull* and of course, the iconic *Repton* series of games. We've chosen *Pipeline* to be the representative example as it never enjoyed a release for other machines and it benefited from a slightly more forgiving difficulty curve than *Ravenskull*.



Starship Command

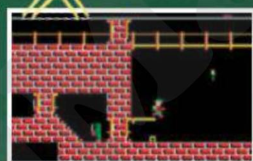
Year: 1983
Publisher: Acornsoft

Peter Irvin programmed this game before he teamed up with the creator of *Thrust* to make one of the most technically astonishing BBC Micro games, *Exile*. Take control of a succession of space fighters as you do battle with overwhelming hoards of alien ships, but there's a twist, literally. In this game, your ship stays in the middle of the screen and everything else spins around. Eject in time and your superiors may grant you another ship.

Castle Quest

Year: 1984
Publisher: Micro Power

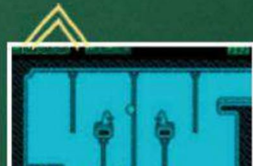
The side-on arcade adventure game was something of a staple of the BBC Micro software catalogue, but *Castle Quest* eschewed action for puzzles. You've been captured and left to rot in a jail cell. A guard stands outside the door. Hang on, there's a torch, but it's just out of reach. You try throwing a chair but it doesn't quite work. If you could get that torch, maybe you could set up a diversion? Charming graphics and a lot to think about.

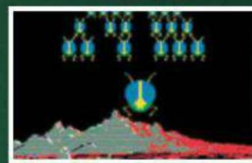


Imogen

Year: 1986
Publisher: Micro Power

At first glance this looks like a typical BBC Micro arcade adventure, but it's more of a puzzle based platform game. The programmers opted for well-animated, detailed mono graphics rather than the bright colours that typically adorn games of this sort on the BBC Micro. The player must switch between the forms of a wizard, a monkey and a cat in order to overcome obstacles and solve puzzles with the help of various pieces of inventory.





Attack on Alpha Centauri

Year: 1983
Publisher: Software Invasion

You move along the bottom of the screen and the bad guys float above you, occasionally breaking formation to swoop down for a kamikaze run or to drop bombs. Sound familiar? Yes, it's a *Space Invaders*-style game, but it plays well and the attractive graphics make it notable. On a deadly attack run, sprite scaling is employed to make the alien move towards the viewer. All this, and it runs at a decent pace.



Vortex

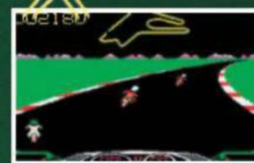
Year: 1983
Publisher: Software Invasion

Fast and furious 3D shooter action. Pilot your craft through wave after wave of enemies in what amounts to an "into the screen" take on the *Galaxian* formula. While it uses a monochrome screen mode, the extra detail of the impressive-looking scaled sprites makes up for that to an extent. Following a wave of bad guys to shoot, it's time to dodge a slew of asteroids. Repetitive, although still pretty fun, gameplay.

Crazee Rider

Year: 1987
Publisher: Superior Software

The graphical presentations of sprite-based racing games tend to be either complex and detailed or speedy and crazy. This fun racing game goes for speed and excellent road feel, and it's everything an 8-bit racer should be, by which we mean it's absolutely mad. You'll need the reflexes of a Pepsi-inebriated 12 year old to cope with the speed, and best of all, you can cheat. Simply sidle up to another racer on a bend and then...KERPOW!



Aviator

Year: 1983
Publisher: Acornsoft

When people think of Geoff Crammond, they tend to think of his groundbreaking series of racing sims that began with Acornsoft, *Revs*. However, he also made an early entry into the flight sim genre, and it's pretty good too. Being a Crammond release, the physics model and the 3D environment are remarkably advanced for the time. When the joys of buzzing around the little town or flying under the bridge wear thin, it's time to do battle with aliens in combat mode.



great ones that came out of this period of gaming history. Like quite a few of what are considered to be the best BBC games, it took the form of a colourful side-on arcade adventure, with smooth scrolling and an emphasis on the kind of fiendish puzzles that were bound to leave a smile on the player's face when eventually solved.

The decision to go for larger, more complicated games was admirable, but sadly the investment in one of the final projects, *Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror*, was probably what sunk the company. The game was originally conceived as a sequel to *Citadel* before the *Doctor Who* licence was obtained, leading to certain difficulties in the transition. Chris explains one of the issues that the game faced at the development phase. "The *Doctor Who* maps and puzzles were designed on paper by members at Micro Power who weren't programmers. I think that was a mistake as computers had so little ram in those days: you needed to have a great programmer who knew the computer inside out who could use stretch the computer to its limits as *Elite* did."

To overcome the memory shortfall, Micro Power decided to include a ROM chip that could be fitted inside the computer. This added to the cost of the game, and also created a barrier for people who didn't like messing with the hardware just to play a game. To top it off, the game itself received only lukewarm reviews. A Commodore 64 version was an improvement on the original, but hardly qualified as a hit for the company, and the planned ZX Spectrum version was abandoned. By then, Chris had sensed that the business had reached the end of the line for them, and moved onto the next BBC Micro publisher, Superior Software.

Superiority Complex

Richard Hanson is the founder of Superior Software, the most prolific BBC Micro publisher. We last spoke with him for our From The Archives article on the company back in issue 79. Unlike a lot of the early 8-bit publishers, Richard was a quality snob right from the beginning, but he credits Chris with elevating Superior's image. Chris brought with him the services of design team Ellis Ives Sprowell,

» [BBC Micro] The eight-directional movement in *Cybertron Mission* added a strong sense of evasive strategy to the game.





5 Most Prolific Publishers

Superior Software Limited

ALTHOUGH THE COMPANY published some good games for the later Acorn Archimedes range, and even dabbled with some conversions for some of the other 8-bit computers, it will always be remembered as the primary BBC Micro publisher. From the start, it concentrated on higher quality, and slightly more expensive games. Of course, its best-known franchise, *Repton*, is destined to be forever associated with Acorn gaming.

Ultimate Play The Game

ONE OF THE best known British companies of the era, they released quite a lot on the BBC in addition to most of the other platforms of the time. They were most famous for their monochrome isometric arcade adventure games, and for these, expect something similar to the ZX Spectrum release. For more colourful fare such as *Sabre Wulf*, it was more of a hodgepodge of the other versions in terms of the visuals.

Acornsoft

IN THE EIGHTIES, home computers would often vanish shortly after production due to lack of public interest. In one of the smartest moves that the company ever made, Acorn's own publishing arm Acornsoft, set out to produce software that took full advantage of the hardware, initially for the Acorn Atom and then for the BBC Micro. *Elite*, *Revs* and countless other superb games, including some spot-on arcade clones, were the result.

Software Invasion

LIKE A LOT of 8-bit software companies, Software Invasion cropped up, delivered some excellent stuff, and then disappeared without a trace. A typical release could be relied on to exhibit technical excellence such as the sprite scaling in *Vortex* and *Attack On Alpha Centauri*. Richard Hanson of Superior Software commented that they were a publisher that he always admired. Scrolling racing game *Jetboat* is also worth a look.

Micropower

THIS COMPANY, LIKE Superior Software, was based in Leeds. It began with a set of cheap and cheerful releases that were well received. As was so often the case in that era, the early games were often single-screen or a copy of a coin-op hit. After a few years, production shifted to a smaller number of high quality games such as *Castle Quest* and the ambitious *Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror*.

5 Key Add-ons

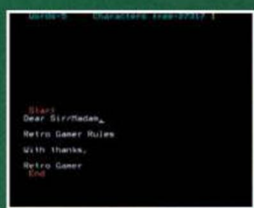


Hybrid Music 500

The *Music 500* was a polyphonic synthesizer module, and the fully expanded system included a four-octave keyboard and a MIDI interface. The flaw of the system was that it was quite CPU intensive, and for that reason, we could not find any evidence of games that made use of it.

Wordwise

A word processor that, like many utilities, fits into one of the free ROM sockets inside the machine, meaning that it could be launched instantly while also saving free memory. It used very clear 40-column text rather than the WYSIWYG approach of later packages.





Morley Teletext Adapter

The BBC Micro's Teletext connection worked both ways, as not only could the BBC Micro display Teletext text and graphics but also it could, with a special interface, be persuaded to receive software that the BBC transmitted as part of its Ceefax service. Free software with no phone bill.

Second Processor

The underneath of the BBC Micro featured a connector labelled Tube, which is for the connection of a second processor. A faster 6502, 80186 (DOS) or Z80 (CP/M) were all options. Most important? The second processor version of *Elite*!





AMX Art

***AMX* offered a** three button mouse with its art package. As the software resided on ROM, and due to the design of the BBC Micro operating system, the features could be accessed from your own programs written in BASIC. A DTP package was also available. Fire up the dot-matrix!

and implemented a continuity with the advertising and box art of later Micro Power and Superior Software games.

We asked Richard if he found the stigma of the BBC Micro as a "school computer" to be a problem that had to be overcome? "I didn't find that to be a problem; many people used the BBC Micro for a combination of games, education and studies. Versatility was perhaps a key factor in the BBC Micro's success." His only criticism of the platform is its lack of memory, though he is quick to point out the BBC Micro coders could be pretty inventive when it came to overcoming this limitation, and found various ways to work with what they had. Richard points out that games such as *The Sentinel*, *Elite* and *Exile* are all standard bearers for early innovations in algorithmic techniques for generating a game world, and other methods of saving memory.

Michael Jakobson was a programmer at the time, and he told us how he employed such tactics when developing *Citadel*, an excellent side-on arcade adventure game. "I had a dream about making a big arcade adventure game for the Beeb where the player could freely explore a large area with many connecting rooms. The big problem with the BBC was that it only had 32K of RAM and most of it got used for the graphics/video data. About 14 bytes for code, graphics, animations, tables, sound, text, is not much. So most BBC games at that time only had very few unique screens and limited graphics. I developed a system where each individual screen (graphics, layout, objects, enemies, patterns, room name) could be generated from just 8-35 bytes."

> "I had a dream about making a big adventure game where the player could freely explore"



As a magazine with perhaps the best overview of the BBC Micro games scene, we were rather keen to know which other productions Richard Hanson admired. "Micro Power brought out some appealing BBC Micro games, such as *Killer Gorilla*, *Ghouls* and *Imogen*. I always admired Software Invasion, with their *Attack On Alpha Centauri, 3D Bomb Alley*, and *Vortex* games. From Ultimate, there was *Knightlore* and *Sabre Wulf*, and Pace Software published the stylish game *Fortress*."

Conclusion

BBC games exude class, and are representative of the best of the 8-bit gaming era. At the same time, many of the games are worth investigation by anyone interested in the history of gaming, as the platform was host to so many technological firsts, not to mention the early work of so many programmers who continued to create and innovate on later platforms. Part of the attraction of exploring the BBC Micro is that, although it was both the birthplace and recipient of many cross-platform hits, the majority of BBC games are either a unique take on a popular theme of the time or original games that can't be found anywhere else.

Thanks go to: David Braben, Chris Payne, Richard Hanson, Jonathan Griffiths, Michael Jakobson, Steve Benway, Simon Lyne, Stephen Twigg and Jeremy Ashcroft.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS

GYNOUG



Gynoug (known as _Wings Of Wor_ in North America) is a demanding Mega Drive shooter from the fertile minds of Masaya, the Japanese studio that birthed the bizarre _Cho Aniki_ franchise – a series of games set in a world where clothing is unfashionable, protein is a deadly weapon, and starring oily bodybuilders with suspect looking holes on the tips of their heads.

By comparison, *Gynoug*'s premise sounds positively sane. You play the role of a powerful beefcake angel named Wor as he embarks on a mission to single-handedly save the heavens from potent demonic forces that have taken over the world and turned every living thing into a hideous-looking, angel-hating monster.

Save for the fact that you steer around a muscular angel rather than a spaceship, *Gynoug* is an archetypal side-scrolling shooter – no terribly thing if the quality and presentation is there, and thankfully it is. Wor has three different upgradeable fire types, and by collecting feathers can increase his speed. He also has an impressive (if a tad unsatisfying) array of secondary special magic attacks (detailed in the accompanying boxout), which are added to his arsenal by collecting scrolls. What really makes *Gynoug* a classic, though, is Masaya's exquisite enemy designs. It features some of the most abhorrent horrors found this side of a nasty stilton-and-port-fuelled night terror, and possibly any shoot-'em-up we can think to name.

Enemies include demonic fish, clouds that cry blood, evil sorcerers, sinister statues that jump to life, and a silly number of disembodied heads pulling strained and pained facial expressions. But all these targets look like potential marriage material next to the game's hideous sub-bosses and end of stage guardians, many of which take the form of an imposing biomechanical monstrosity that fills up most of the screen.

Though certainly a solid shooter, *Gynoug* isn't without a few design flaws. While for the most part enemy patterns are simple to overcome, there are a few instances where enemies appear from out of seemingly nowhere, giving you very little time to react before it's too late. The level design also feels quite pedestrian too. Save for the occasional bit of fancy rotational effect that enlivens proceedings a little bit, most levels are simply just lengthy runs from left to right with little in the way of dramatic set-piece moments.

The Mega Drive certainly isn't short of great blasters (*Thunderforce III*, *Gaiares*, *Grey Lancer*, *Aero Fighters*, et al) and *Gynoug* is undoubtedly one of the strangest and challenging found in its library. Its gruelling six levels are certainly guaranteed to test the skills and dexterity of even the most seasoned and proficient master of the shooter arts, so be prepared to dedicate quite a few hours to finishing it. And going for as little as a fiver today, it therefore offers excellent value too.

» [Mega Drive] *Gynoug* features some freaky bosses. Its most infamous is this guy, Orrpus, who waits at the end of stage 4.





INFO

- » **SYSTEM:** MEGA DRIVE
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** Wii (VIRTUAL CONSOLE)

SPELL IT OUT

We take a look at Wor's eight magic tricks



THUNDERBOLT
Wor can momentarily fire a forward-aiming bolt of lightning, offering him a powerful concentrated attack.



AURA SHIELD
Temporarily protects Wor from enemies and projectiles. It comes in very handy against bosses.



MAGIC ARROWS
Basically fires two homing missiles that hover in front of Wor for a time before locking on to enemies.



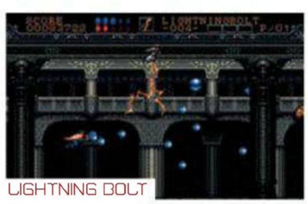
ENERGY BALL
Wor diagonally fires two balls of energy – very useful for taking out annoying ground targets.



ELEMENTAL
Wor calls in air support from two fairies that encircle him while firing lightning bolts.



GROUND ATTACK
Wor launches two missiles, one at the ground and one at the ceiling, which travel across surfaces.



LIGHTNING BOLT
Causes an angel to appear on the screen. Wor can make her fire a bolt of lightning that shields him.



WILDFIRE
Increases both the power and size of Wor's standard shot to make busting demons quite a bit easier.

THE MAKING OF

Lucky & Wild

When Namco tasked its best men with creating an action-packed shooter on wheels, the result was like a head-on collision between Chase HQ and Tango & Cash. Sorrel Tilley hops into the passenger seat and goes for a wild ride with creator Yutaka Kounoe






IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** ACTION RACER

Growing up in the golden age of arcade gaming, playing classics like *Galaxian, Pac-Man* and *Galaga* must have made quite an impression on the young Yutaka Kounoe; in his primary school yearbook all he wrote was, 'I will join Namco', and, years later, after graduating, Namco was the only company he applied to. In 1991 he got in. "Just like I dreamed, I was assigned to the game design section of the arcade division. The team for each project was very small, and immediately after I finished induction training, I was made lead designer on a game called *Tank Force*."

Despite cutting his teeth on the sequel to *Battle City* and *Tank Battalion*, and later going on to command some of Namco's most successful franchises, Kounoe was always happiest at the helm of something new: "I have always believed in the importance of original, pioneering titles – the only series I was in charge of were *Point Blank* and *Tekken 1-3*. Other than that, I spearheaded about 20 non-series projects. I've developed games for all kinds of devices: small to large scale arcade games, mobile phones, consumer games, card games, and even camera-based games." One of Kounoe's most inventive creations has since been obscured somewhat by the mists of time and clouds of carcinogenic fumes from unnumbered cigarette ends. This is a great shame, because *Lucky & Wild* is a pinnacle of guilty pleasure gaming – an unapologetic joy ride through shopping malls, dusty canyons, and neon city streets.

Chain-smoking *Street Fighter* addicts are not the only sight that will greet you on waltzing into a typical Japanese game centre – they are also rife with young men trying to impress their dates with mad skills on the UFO catchers. Strangely, it was couples such as these that Namco had in the crosshairs when it decided to focus on two-player vehicular mayhem. "At that time, the planning department had a project meeting where it was decided that we'd be making a large-scale arcade cabinet that could be enjoyed even by couples. We imagined men would probably enjoy this kind of game together too.

"Buddy cop comedies like *CHiPs* and *Police Story* were well known in Japan and abroad, so we thought players would find it easy to engage with a farcical buddy cop theme." *CHiPs* even influenced the naming of Kounoe's game, since in Japan it was known as *Jon & Ponch*. "To differentiate it from other companies' products – and to protect the pride of the development department – we also resolved to include some more original elements. Back then, Namco driving games like *Final Lap* were highly regarded within the company, so we decided to make good use of our development know-how for that type of cabinet to design a game where you drive and shoot at the same time."

Developing such a game was no easy ride, as Kounoe describes: "The toughest challenge of the game's design was the number of control devices it required. Specifically, one player has an analogue steering wheel and gun, as well as an accelerator and brake pedal. If you compare that with player two, who only has to shoot, there is

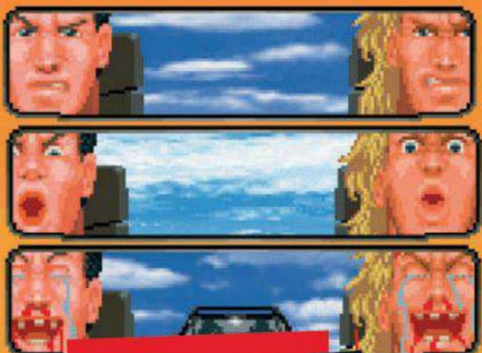
Having a Breakdown



FOR EVERY GAME that gets the green light, there is a road not taken. "If *L&W* had not gone into production, we probably would have been making a first-person fighting arcade game controlled by two long analogue sticks. That was the proposal that was gathering steam before *L&W* got the go-ahead. Later, this project found its way into the world in the form of the Xbox title *Breakdown*." So over a decade after dreaming it up, Kounoe finally got to direct his oddball action romp (preserving the unique fighting style into the bargain), but reveals that he still pines for the arcade version that never was: "I dare say that an arcade game where you got to lay the smack down on your opponent in hand-to-hand combat, taking a stick in each hand and giving the cabinet a sound thumping, might have been even better than *L&W*!"

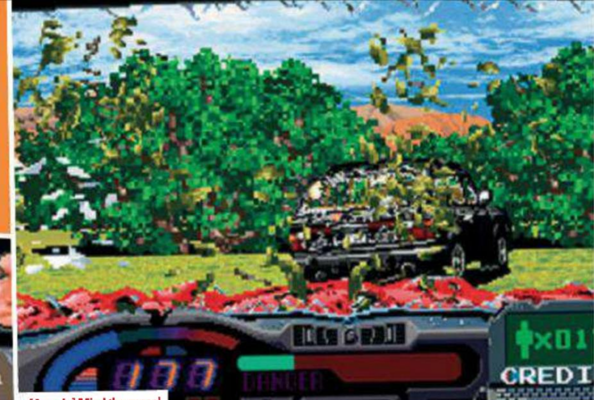
THE MAKING OF





Men in the mirror

ONE OF THE more unusual elements of *Lucky & Wild* was the rear-view mirror, showcasing the frantic facial antics of the title characters. "We were trying to find a way to best emphasise their personalities," Kounoe explains. "*Final Lap* was a big hit for Namco, and the *L&W* team had some staff in common. *Final Lap* was a competitive racer, so the rear-view mirror was indispensable. Company philosophy meant we had already implemented the mirror in the prototype stage of *L&W*. Our programmer built it without even having the graphical data, at a stage when the system and graphics hadn't been brought together yet. Now that's a true programmer, and Namco had a brilliant development culture that fostered this kind of sensibility. After creating the base program for cars, we finished a mirror that would draw cars approaching from the rear. Once we had everything set up, we decided to give the characters a constant presence. Shigeki Toyama handled film-style direction, so it was probably he who came up with this idea. I'd heard good lip-synching is important in the West, so even though it doesn't matter much in Japan, I thought, 'Gotta hammer out this code!' Basically it was a system that synched the mouth shapes for different vowels with the pronunciation in the voice data, refreshing the facial animation accordingly. It made sure the lips matched the script, and the script matched the situation."



» [Arcade] Mind the grass!



» [Arcade] Coding the shopping mall customers caused Kounoe plenty of grief.

an imbalance, which cost us a lot of time debating how to resolve. The design we'd arrived at called for a ride-style machine with a simple appeal, but it led to endless discussions about how complex and elaborate the controls needed to be and how we could make the devices less confusing. In the end, we developed the game in such a way that you can just floor the accelerator and forget about the brake. The player has freedom to use the pedals how they like, and the gun is automatic, so you can fire wildly without having to aim carefully at small enemy sprites. It's refreshing because you can just plough on through all the nonsense and violence. On top of that, we were careful with the placement of the guns to give the choice of dual-wielding to player two."

The freedom given to the player was a significant aspect of *L&W*'s popularity. All kinds of combinations were possible, including an 'unofficial' three-player style where one person acts as wheelman with two friends riding shotgun. This sneaky freebie was anticipated by the team, but due to the game's small domestic fan base, they never had a chance to witness it first-hand: "It was more popular abroad than in Japan, so at that time we didn't have concrete information about how much people enjoyed three-player games or dual-wielding. I would have been happy to see the many different ways people had fun with the game, though."

Kounoe's early designs for *L&W* took cues from Sega's *Rail Chase* machine, released in the same

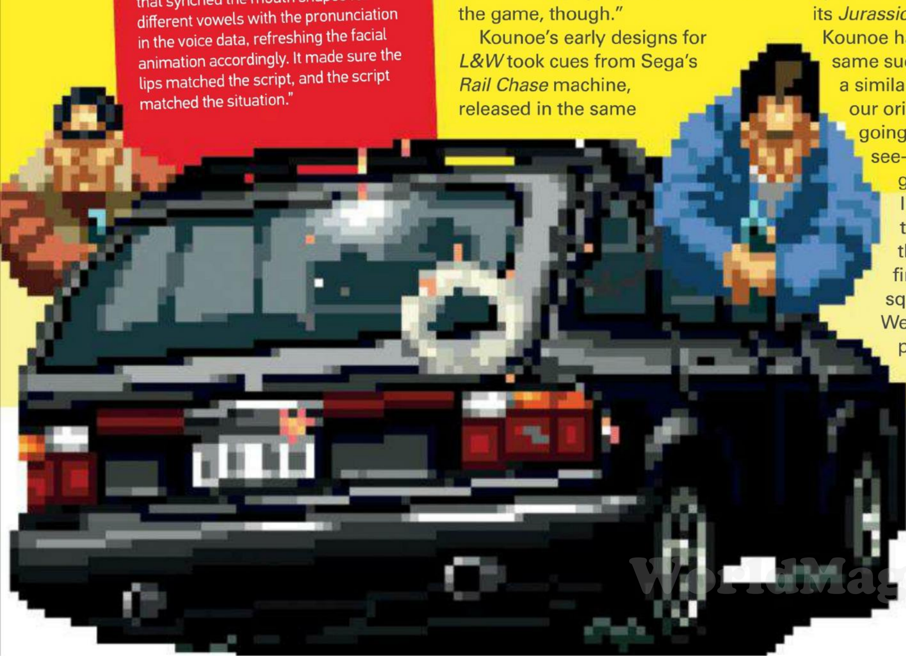


year. *Rail Chase* was a two-player rail shooter, although cleverly basing the game around a mine cart ride eliminated the complications of steering. The aspect that interested Kounoe was Sega's innovative Magical Bench Seat Air Drive System, which turned the game into a much more physical experience. The system gave the player the sensation of riding over bumpy ground in a real vehicle by forcing the seat

We developed it in such a way that you can just floor the accelerator and forget about the brake

up and down. The feature proved popular for Sega, which ended up including it in *Rail Chase 2* and its *Jurassic Park* arcade machine. Kounoe had hoped to emulate the same success by incorporating a similar function into *L&W*. "In our original plans, the seat was going to rock violently like a see-saw," he says, "so the guns weren't semi-auto. In the beginning we were told by the higher-ups that the gun should only fire one bullet with each squeeze of the trigger. We had a lot of trouble persuading them that it was flat-out impossible to aim at the enemy like this. In such a frantic and farcical game, a rocking seat would also have given a sense of exhilaration that is more absurd than real life. We made all kinds of prototypes of the mechanism for making the seat move, but we had problems with machine parts wearing out too easily, and it wasn't really compatible with an aiming and shooting type of game. I guess we'll never know if it would have been a good mix."

It wasn't just the mechanical side of the equation that put Kounoe under pressure, either. Namco's antiquated development tools were struggling to keep up with the increasing demands of modern racers. By the early Nineties, arcade racers were at the limits of what they could achieve using 2D sprites, and the first polygonal games were poised to overthrow them. Kounoe and his team opted to stick with sprites but use Namco's accumulated expertise in visual sorcery to create a pseudo-3D world. "Our proprietary circuit boards were quite poor in those days, and working with those limitations made it a real challenge to create a crazy, movie-like style, and to conjure up a 3D appearance. *L&W* didn't use polygonal techniques, so instead we approached it using tricks like realistic arrangement of lampposts, hedges, billboards and stuff like that, lining both sides of the road with loads of these 2D objects. This was a method we 'inherited' from *Pole Position*, which was perfected













DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TIME CRISIS (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1995

POINT BLANK
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994

TEKKEN
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994

BREAKDOWN
SYSTEMS: XBOX
YEAR: 2004



» [Arcade] Anyone fancy a cocktail?



» [Arcade] Look beyond the explosions and you'll find a wealth of detail bringing the world to life.



through Namco's development history in racing games."

Many hours of meticulous coding and experimentation were called for because the programmers had to play everything by ear. "The depth, angle and spacing of the billboards, buildings and other scenery were all judged solely on human intuition," recalls Kounoe. "Although we created the game's raw data using Namco's proprietary design tools, it was only our *L&W* development machine that could handle the pseudo-3D movement, so the designers really had to hone their craft and devise everything using just the design tools and their own mental simulations."

The realistically twisting highway, complete with scaling roadside scenery and gravity-defying jumps made *L&W* one of the most convincing sprite-based experiences a gamer could have, and the sheer level of detail in the environment cemented this. "We were able to construct a world with a mock 3D feel, just by arranging these objects one by one at either side of the road," recalls Kounoe. "The internet didn't exist, so we couldn't just look up images. We drew the objects one at a time, using printed materials like photo albums and manga as well as movies for reference for details. When you play the game, these bits of scenery just look like decoration as you rocket past, but they're actually the fruits of hard labour – each pixel was painstakingly hand-drawn by the design team. That period seems idyllic if you compare it with the realistic polygonal games of today, but because all of the materials and data were created in this handmade style, the project team had to be exceptionally large for the time."

The outdated equipment and Kounoe's insistence on attention to detail presented hurdles at every step: "When you're tearing through the inside of the shopping mall, it would have been unnatural if there were no people, but it was against our intentions to include mowing down pedestrians – it was too cruel! So we had to do a lot of fine-tuning with the distance at which the shoppers would start running. Our development equipment was old, though, and checking the data on the actual machine took over 15 minutes, so we would stay late every night, coding feverishly. This is how we constantly stepped up our efforts to add a bit of scope and surprise to the game. I still have lots of fond memories of working on it. The project members had enjoyed pouring all their energy into its creation, and we knew players would love it, so at the final stage the computer room was buzzing with excitement."

Before we bring our chat to a close, we have to ask about the much-discussed connection with *Tango & Cash*. This cheesy Eighties romp starring Sly Stallone and Kurt Russell may be known as *Deadfall* in Japan, but the similarities are unmistakable: a drug-busting cop duo, one in a suit with short hair, the other a scruffy git with flowing locks; high-speed car chases; explosions. "I've never heard of it until now!" admits Kounoe. "My co-designer, Shigeki Toyama, and the team might have used it as a reference, but it can't have been important because I didn't know about it, and I was at the centre of the project. Having looked it up, though, they really do look alike, don't they? If I get a chance to have a chat with the old team, I'll ask them about it!"



25 YEARS OF



Metal Gear is a quarter of a century old this year. To celebrate this amazing achievement, Damien McFerran has huddled himself beneath a cardboard box, hoping no one will notice

The *Metal Gear* series is unquestionably one of the most beloved videogame franchises in existence today. With 30 million copies sold since the release of the first game in 1987, the series has captivated fans and inspired everything from graphic novels to toys and even musical concerts.

Given this tremendous level of commercial and critical success, it's amazing to think that the series that sired characters such as Solid Snake, Revolver Ocelot and Meryl Silverburgh very nearly never happened. When *Metal Gear* supremo Hideo Kojima began work on what would become his signature franchise, he was despondent and depressed about his standing within the videogame development fraternity. From the moment he joined Konami's home computer division as a planner in 1986, he had to endure the rejection of his ideas and talents by more senior staff. After achieving a degree of respectability with his work on the MSX title *Penguin Adventure*, Kojima was asked to take the reins on another project, this time with an overtly military focus. The game was, of course, *Metal Gear*.



Due to the constraints of the MSX2 hardware, creating a balls-out action epic simply wasn't an option. Inspired by this limitation, Kojima decided a shift of focus was required; instead of going for in-your-face carnage, why not create a war game where the protagonist had to sneak past enemies to achieve his objective? "I think the most revolutionary aspect of the original *Metal Gear* was its emphasis on avoiding combat, not rushing into it *Rambo*-style," explains Ryan Payton, former assistant producer at Kojima Productions. "*Metal Gear*'s non-traditional approach to the action genre was something that a lot of people took notice of." Despite the unique nature of the premise, rumour has it that Konami's bigwigs weren't enamoured with the concept, but Kojima – at the end of his tether and reportedly close to leaving the company in frustration – stuck to his guns. The result was the birth of Tactical Espionage Action, and one of the most iconic heroes the medium of videogaming has ever produced.



Metal Gear launched in Japan on the MSX2 in 1987. The positive reaction to the game vindicated Kojima's decision to stay true to his convictions, and resulted in a quick conversion to the more commercially viable Nintendo Famicom console in December of the same year. Although the MSX2 computer was reasonably successful in Japan, its popularity was minuscule when compared to that of the Famicom; Nintendo's 8-bit console dominated the market, making it a very attractive platform for Kojima's stealth epic. In the West, the game received an official English-language release on the Nintendo Entertainment System, the Famicom's Western guise. It's through this version that many American and European gamers were first introduced to Solid Snake, but tragically it's a mere shadow of the MSX2 original. "The NES game is not recognised by the original development team or true hardcore fans," reveals Ryan. "It is only loosely based on the original MSX2 edition." Kojima wasn't involved with the process, and has since expressed disappointment at how his vision was diluted and tinkered with. Dialogue was cut, level layouts changed and graphics altered. In an especially unfathomable move, the titular Metal Gear mech – a walking nuclear-launching platform – was removed entirely.

Despite the harmful nature of these changes, *Metal Gear* managed to find a receptive audience in the West – largely because the majority of NES players had no way of comparing the two versions, and probably had no idea that a superior MSX2 version existed. Even in its watered-down format, the NES edition managed to provide a gameplay experience quite unlike anything else on the system at the time. That, and a rapidly expanding NES user base ravenous for third-party software, catapulted Solid Snake and Big Boss into the consciousness of thousands of players.

Indeed, North America's seemingly unquenchable thirst for new titles resulted in the swift appearance of a NES-based sequel to *Metal Gear*. Crafted without any input from Kojima whatsoever, 1990's *Snake's Revenge* is dismissed by most seasoned fans. "To me, *Snake's Revenge* is like *Indiana Jones And The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*," comments Ryan, a lifelong follower of the series even before he joined Kojima Productions. "I try to pretend it doesn't exist." It's highly likely that Kojima felt the same way, as



Creator of *Snatcher* and *Policenauts*, Hideo Kojima is most famous for the *Metal Gear* series.





» [NES] *Snake's Revenge* was never released in Japan, and is seen by many as a poor sequel.



» [MSX2] *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* was Kojima's response to the poorly received *Snake's Revenge*, which he had no involvement with.



» [GBC] The Game Boy Color *Metal Gear: Ghost Babel* may be limited to the small screen, but it remains an amazing achievement.

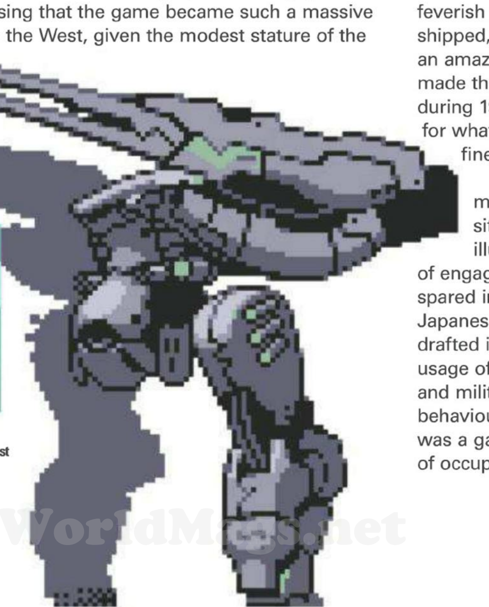
the US-exclusive release of *Snake's Revenge* spurred him on to create a true successor to the MSX2 classic in the shape of *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. A vast improvement over not only *Snake's Revenge* but also the original title, *Metal Gear 2* pushed the MSX2 to its limits and remains one of the most critically acclaimed releases for the system. Despite the high quality of the game, it remained a Japan-only proposition until its inclusion as a bonus game in the 2006 release of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* on the PlayStation 2. Prior to this, the lack of an official English translation – combined with the tantalisingly unreachable nature of the game – pushed *Metal Gear 2* into the realms of legend for many fans.

Sadly, this outstanding title would be refused the same Famicom conversion treatment that was offered to its forerunner, and would mark the end of Solid Snake's adventures for a while. Tentative plans to release the third *Metal Gear* game on the 3DO in 1994 came to nothing, and it wasn't until the end of the decade that Snake would lace up his trademark bandanna again. When he eventually did in 1998, it marked the second coming of Kojima's hero and the glorious rebirth of the *Metal Gear* series.

"IF RAIDEN HAD BEEN A GREAT CHARACTER, THE COMMUNITY WOULD HAVE LOVED THE SURPRISE"



David Hayter's performances have made Snake one of the most recognisable voices in gaming.



Metal Gear Solid took the stealth gameplay of the 8-bit versions and applied a lavish 3D perspective. Coming relatively late in the life of Sony's 32-bit PlayStation console, the game benefited from vastly increased understanding of the hardware. Although it looks crude by modern standards, the visuals were unprecedented at the time of release. In hindsight, it's actually quite surprising that the game became such a massive hit in the West, given the modest stature of the NES instalments and the fact that an awful lot of English-speaking players had never played a *Metal Gear* title before. Ryan has his own theory on this triumphant success. "*Metal Gear Solid* instantly captured the attention of game enthusiasts because of its incredible 3D graphics and cinematic presentation. I don't believe it needed the *Metal Gear* branding to excite the world, but I don't believe it hurt it either. Not unlike *BioShock*, I think it was the pre-release demo that propelled anticipation to feverish levels, and like *BioShock*, when the game shipped, it didn't disappoint." It is estimated that an amazing 12 million demo discs for the game made their way into homes all over the globe during 1998, building up a frenzy of anticipation for what many hoped would be the PlayStation's finest hour.

Metal Gear Solid was bursting with memorable moments, characters and situations. Kojima worked closely with illustrator Yoji Shinkawa to create a cast of engaging characters, and no expense was spared in making the title as realistic as possible. Japanese weapons expert Motosada Mori was drafted in to coach the development team on the usage of firearms and close-quarters combat, and military advisers offered information on the behaviour of vehicles and explosives. The result was a game that felt uniquely authentic; instead of occupying an ultra-violent fantasy world along



» [PS2] *Snake Eater* introduced a camouflage feature, which enabled Snake to blend in with the environment.





» [PS2] *Snake Eater* took the action into the jungle, giving the player new tactics to use.





» [PSP] *Metal Gear Solid* has turned hiding underneath cardboard boxes into an art form.



» [PS2] *Metal Gear Solid 2* introduced the ability to hide bodies and conceal yourself in lockers.

the lines of *Doom* or *Quake*, *Metal Gear Solid* seemed to be rooted in reality, despite the more bizarre elements of its storyline – which included cyborg ninjas and enemies capable of mind-reading and telekinesis.

Coming at the end of the PlayStation's lifespan, *Metal Gear Solid* didn't get a true 32-bit sequel. Additional training simulations were made available in the shape of *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions* (bundled with the North American version of the game as *Metal Gear Solid: Integral* in Japan), but the true follow-up was destined to appear on the PlayStation's successor. In the meantime, fans had to content themselves with *Metal Gear: Ghost Babel* (misleadingly released in some regions as plain old *Metal Gear Solid*), on the Nintendo Game Boy Color. A return to the series' 2D roots, the biggest change was the scrolling playing field. In the original MSX2 and NES titles, locations were navigated one screen at a time, flipping to the next screen when the player reached the edge of the display. Eight-way movement was another welcome addition. Many fans consider *Ghost Babel* to be the ultimate 2D instalment in the series, bettering even the mighty MSX2 sequel. This is largely down to the fact that the Game Boy Color game manages to combine the classic top-down experience with gameplay advances introduced in the 3D PlayStation edition.

As welcome as a portable *Metal Gear* unquestionably was, what Snake lovers really wanted was a proper big-screen sequel. *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty* would eventually see release in 2002, after what seemed like an eternity of hype. Sony relied heavily on footage from the game to stir up public interest in its PS2 console, and it predictably became a massive seller all over the world. However, despite its high critical standing, the convoluted story and penchant for mind-bending plot twists ensures that it continues to be a talking point even to this day.

Another controversial move by Kojima was to pull the rug from underneath players by switching control from Snake to an entirely new lead character. Raiden has since undergone something of a rehabilitation, but at the time players complained about his feminine looks and annoying Codec conversations with his girlfriend. "If Raiden had been a great character, the community would have loved the surprise and there would have been no controversy," says Ryan, who clearly has similar feelings. "But I respect what Hideo was trying to do. Most game creators wouldn't attempt something like that."

HISTORY OF STEALTH GAMES

Metal Gear popularised the concept of stealth action, but it wasn't the first. Here are the games that laid the foundations of a genre



PAC-MAN

(1980 - NAMCO - ARCADE)

It might seem like an odd choice, but *Pac-Man* is a precursor to all subsequent stealth games, as it has the player evading enemies rather than attacking them. This style of play would later become a staple of the stealth genre.



005

(1981 - SEGA - ARCADE)

Arguably the first true stealth game, *005* tasks the player with getting an elite agent – complete with valuable briefcase full of top-secret documents – to a waiting helicopter. To do so, you have to avoid enemies and hide behind boxes.

CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

(1981 - MUSE SOFTWARE - APPLE II)



The inspiration for id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D* is one of the first stealth action games on a domestic format. The game can be beaten with the bare minimum of bloodshed, and firing your weapon attracts the unwanted attention of enemies.

BEYOND CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

(1984 - MUSE SOFTWARE - APPLE II)



This sequel offered pretty much the same gameplay as the original *Wolfenstein*, but added enhancements such as guards demanding to see passes in order to access certain rooms and the ability to drag dead bodies out of view, a feature that would later be added to *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty*.



» [PSone] *Metal Gear Solid* set a new benchmark for action games in the 32-bit era.



» [PS2] VR training missions have been a common feature in the *Metal Gear Solid* titles.



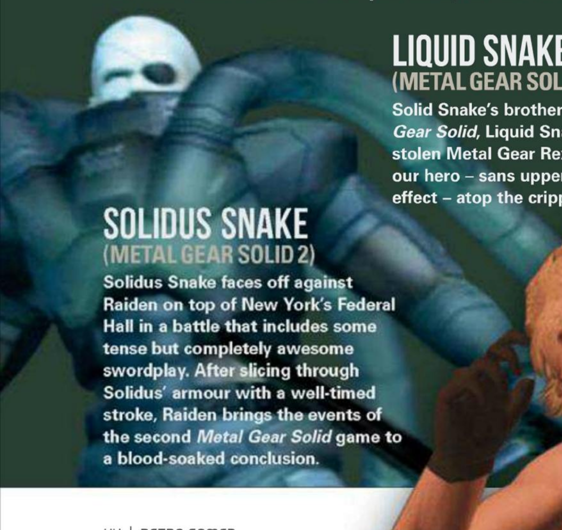
» [PS3] Snake enjoys a light-hearted moment with his miniature assistant, Metal Gear Mk.II.

Another sticking point was the game's cinematic cut-scenes, some of which seemed to last forever. Introduced in the original *Metal Gear Solid*, they grew in length for this sequel, leading many critics to ponder if Kojima had taken his quest to make an 'interactive movie' one step too far. Even dedicated fan Ryan expresses frustration at some of the longer sequences: "I've never been one to defend *Metal Gear*'s long cut-scenes. While I believe non-interactive cinematics are part of the DNA of the series, there are times when I wish more story was communicated through gameplay." Regardless of these relatively minor faults, *Sons Of Liberty* remains a towering achievement, and its scope and ambition have led some to brand it the world's first 'postmodern' videogame. "I admire *Metal Gear Solid 2* because it really tries to say something," gushes Ryan. "It's a bizarre mix of military fetishism, postmodern storytelling, comic book bosses, internet politics and unedited melodrama… all needing to be carried by stealth action gameplay. It's far from a perfect game, but I love that it exists. There's nothing else like it."

For Snake's next outing, Kojima joined forces with American studio Silicon Knights to revisit the 1998 classic on the GameCube, this time with vastly improved visuals, re-recorded speech and many gameplay elements borrowed directly from *Sons Of Liberty*. *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* wasn't an entirely successful venture, though; the game suffers from frame rate drops, and the revised cut-scenes – courtesy of Japanese director Ryuhei Kitamura, who is famed for his obsession with bullet time and overly complex gun battles – came under fire from hardcore fans, who see *Twin Snakes* as something of a disappointment. "I consider the original

BEST BOSS ENCOUNTERS

The Metal Gear series is famous for its outlandish and epic boss fights. Picking the best ones is harder than you think, but we've had a go regardless



LIQUID SNAKE
(METAL GEAR SOLID)

Solid Snake's brother and main antagonist of *Metal Gear Solid*, Liquid Snake initially attacks with the stolen Metal Gear Rex, before duking it out with our hero – sans upper body clothing, for macho effect – atop the crippled mech. A truly epic battle.



SOLIDUS SNAKE
(METAL GEAR SOLID 2)

Solidus Snake faces off against Raiden on top of New York's Federal Hall in a battle that includes some tense but completely awesome swordplay. After slicing through Solidus' armour with a well-timed stroke, Raiden brings the events of the second *Metal Gear Solid* game to a blood-soaked conclusion.



THE END
(METAL GEAR SOLID 3)

One of *Metal Gear*'s most fascinating boss characters, The End is a geriatric sniper who apparently can stay motionless for weeks while waiting for his target. This tense battle calls to mind the equally brilliant long-distance duel with Sniper Wolf in the first *Metal Gear Solid*.



MGS3'S ECONOMICAL STORYTELLING FOCUSES THE PLAYER'S EMOTIONS ON BIG BOSS'S STRUGGLE

Metal Gear Solid to be the definitive version," states Ryan, who obviously agrees.

Following the controversy of *Metal Gear Solid 2* and the relative downer that was *The Twin Snakes*, it was clear that Kojima would need to pull something very special out of the bag with the next entry in the franchise. He did that, and then some. *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* hit the PlayStation 2 in 2004, and focused on the early life of the series' original bad guy, Big Boss. Set in the Cold War, the game scaled back the high-tech gadgets and pitted the player against a wide range of enemies – both human and otherwise. The introduction of a stamina gauge and limb-specific injuries kept players on their toes, and the ability to blend into scenery using camouflage increased the potential for stealth. These new gameplay elements combined with a riveting plot made the game a smash hit with critics and consumers alike. "I think *MGS3*'s economical storytelling really focuses the player's emotions on the struggle that Big Boss goes through," says Ryan. "I also think the game greatly benefits from the Cold War setting, as it grounded the fiction into something more believable than any of the other games in the series. The game was lovingly crafted, from the countless details and secrets to the absolutely incredible sound design. *Metal Gear Solid 3* is my favourite game of all time."

Having redefined the stealth action genre with *Snake Eater*, Kojima Productions turned its attention to portable hardware. Sony's newly launched PlayStation Portable was an obvious candidate for development, but the resultant title – *Metal Gear Ac!d* – wasn't quite what fans were expecting. Instead of real-time action, it adopted a turn-based system (known as Active Command Intelligence Duel – hence the title, *Ac!d*) which relied on a deck of customisable cards covering actions such as movement, melee attacks and weapon usage. The gameplay may have been radically different, but that didn't stop *Ac!d* from being popular enough to warrant a sequel in 2005 (2006 for the English-language versions), as well as ports to mobile phones of the era.

"*Metal Gear Ac!d* was a refreshing spin on the traditional formula that brought the series to the PSP party in card-strategy drag," comments Ryan. "I think the director, Shinta Nojiri, did a great job with those two titles. I hope we haven't seen the last of the *Ac!d* games." Fans still yearned for a proper portable *Metal Gear Solid,* however, and thankfully they didn't have to wait very long. 2006 saw the launch of *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops*, a stealth action game with resource management elements, which followed on from the events in *Snake Eater*. The real-time gameplay returned, but this time around the action was less linear, with the player able to revisit previous locations to recruit soldiers for his mercenary army. This aspect of the game made it very different from previous outings, but in a refreshing way. It also made *Portable Ops* a perfect mobile game, as



COCOON
(PEACE WALKER)

***Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* is bursting with amazing boss battles, but the fight against the massive AI-controlled 'Cocoon' tank has to be one of the most memorable. With its multitude of attack turrets and horrific chainsaw-packing appendage, it's not a boss to be taken lightly.**

SCREAMING MANTIS
(METAL GEAR SOLID 4)

The leader of the all-female 'Beauty an the Beast' unit, Screaming Mantis is able to control minds and dead bodies using a pair of dolls based on Psycho Mantis (*Metal Gear Solid*) and The Sorrow (*Snake Eater*). One of the franchises' most psychologically draining boss encounters, you won't forget this one in a hurry.

METAL GEAR QUIRKS

Never a series to take itself entirely seriously, Metal Gear has more than its fair share of classic 'WTF?!' moments. Allow us to refresh your memories with this selection.

PRESIDENT CUPPING RAIDEN



When Raiden locates the President in *Metal Gear Solid 2*, the leader of the United States can't quite believe our hero is male. To check, he does what any other world leader would do – he gropes Raiden's groin. Perfectly normal behavior, if you ask us. Ahem.

PULL THE OTHER ONE



In *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s tanker mission, Snake comes face to face with a locked door. Being the stubborn type, he tries to open it anyway – and promptly pulls the entire handle off. After a comic double take, he then sheepishly puts it back on again, hoping no one will notice.

HEY JOHNNY



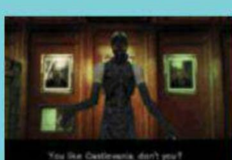
Based on character model designer Hideki Sasaki, who is reportedly something of a slacker, poor Johnny Sasaki appears in several *Metal Gear* games, always with some kind of illness or stomach complaint. Despite his goofy nature, he eventually marries Meryl at the conclusion of *Guns Of The Patriots*.

GETTING SOME SHUT-EYE



NES games were often packed with unintentionally hilarious English translations, and *Metal Gear* was no exception. Guards in the game tend to nod off after a while, at which point they exclaim 'I feel asleep!!' before snoozing. Even today, it's incredibly amusing.

MEMORY MAN



Before you fight Psycho Mantis in *Metal Gear Solid* on the PlayStation, he checks your memory card and comments on what Konami games you've been playing. Needless to say, he found *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* on ours.



» [PS3] *Guns Of The Patriots* sees Snake reaching the end of his life. His rapid ageing is due to his status as a clone.





» [Wii] Snake's most amusing infiltration yet – sneaking his way into Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros. Melee*.



» [PSP] The two *Metal Gear Ac!d* titles on Sony's PSP offered a change in gameplay, but thankfully not at the expense of entertainment.

> **METAL GEAR SOLID 4 MORPHED INTO THE ULTIMATE GAME FOR THE PLAYSTATION 3**

missions were short and could be tackled on the way to work, or in lunch breaks. *Portable Ops Plus* – which followed in 2007 – was a standalone expansion focused entirely on online multplayer. "I love the *Portable Ops* titles because more of their focus is on pure gameplay," explains Ryan. "The recruitment elements, in particular, are one of the series' highlights for me – recruiting soldiers *Pokémon*-style, training and deploying them on missions really makes the PSP games hard to put down."

With the release of the PlayStation 3, Kojima and his team once again found themselves staring in the face of a hardware transition. Announced in 2005, the forth *Metal Gear Solid* title would be developed for Sony's third-generation console and would shift the action away from Big Boss and back to Solid Snake. Arguably the biggest twist was Snake's appearance; due to the cloning process, our gravel-voiced hero had aged rapidly. Like Raiden's starring role in the second *Metal Gear Solid* game, Snake's wrinkled face proved to be a stumbling block for some fans. Ryan, who worked extensively on the production of *Metal Gear Solid 4* during his tenure with Kojima Productions, is of the opinion that the move was a clever one. "Old Snake was a fun character to work on. His old age and weakened physical state instantly triggered empathy with players, and it was fun to work with David Hayter on portraying Snake's new 'old' voice. A lot of people don't mention this, but I think Old Snake is really funny. The story is serious, but David Hayter really did a great job bringing out Snake's old man humour."



Insanely talented artist Yoji Shinkawa is largely responsible for the look of the series.

After the relatively restrained nature of *Snake Eater*'s low-tech gadgets, *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots* saw the series take an impressive stride towards the future. Bipedal tanks are commonplace, and Snake makes use of a cutting-edge OctoCamo suit to blend into his surroundings and avoid detection. Unsurprisingly, given Ryan's involvement with the game's production, it holds a special place in his heart. "I'm very proud of *Metal Gear Solid 4*. It morphed into the ultimate game for the new PlayStation 3. The opening movie, cinematics, various real-world locales, the iPod feature… I look back on *Metal Gear Solid 4* as more of a total entertainment package than simply a stealth action videogame. I think this is why gameplay traditionalists sometimes struggle with it, because it's so much more than just a videogame."

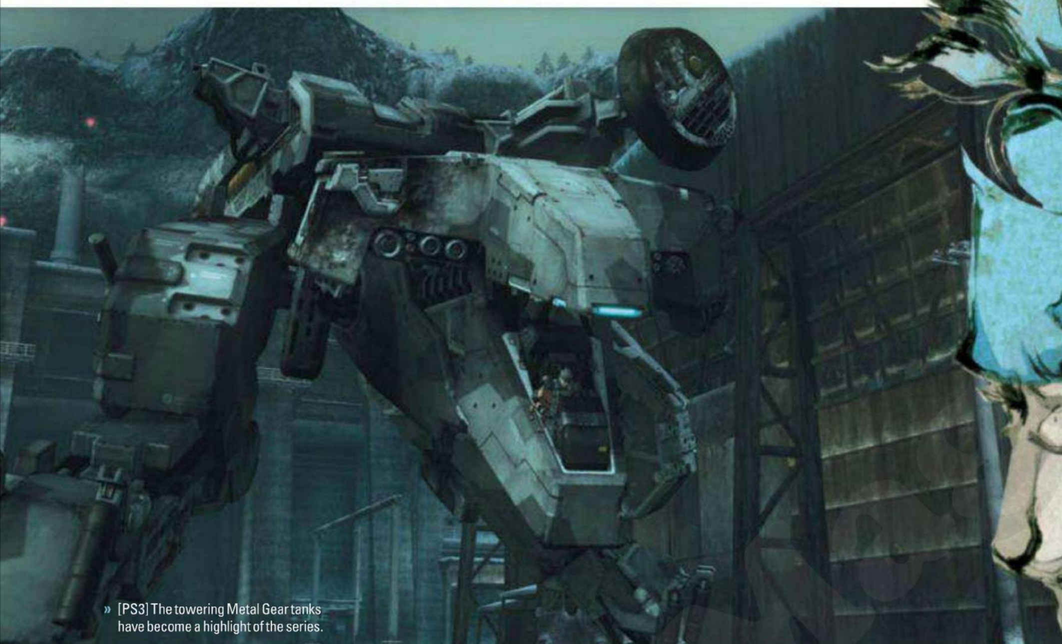
Fans might have hoped that Kojima would pick the PS3 as the platform for his next *Metal Gear* outing, but the amazing popularity of the PSP in Japan at the time made it an attractive option for the next chapter in the story. Like the two *Portable Ops* games, *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker* zipped back in time to the era of Big Boss. The gameplay is a close match to that seen in the fourth title, but Kojima was keen to make use of the PSP's multiplayer connectivity. Standard missions could be tackled cooperatively





» [PS3] Despite his elderly appearance, *MGS4's* Snake can still mix it up when he needs to.





» [PS3] The towering Metal Gear tanks have become a highlight of the series.



with a friend, while boss battles allowed up to four players to take part. Like *Portable Ops*, the player was able to expand their army of mercenaries, and send them out on sorties. Compared to the relatively linear progression of *Metal Gear Solid 3* and *4*, *Peace Walker* represented a massive step forward – a fact that no doubt contributed to its recent conversion to the PS3 and Xbox 360 as part of the *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*. "I'm happy *Peace Walker* is getting a second wind on home consoles," says Ryan. "I think it's a great game and deserving of more attention."



» Much-maligned protagonist Raiden is set to star in *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* in a somewhat different form than previous appearances.

With *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* looming on the horizon, the series hasn't done anything to shake off its controversial roots. Programmed by Platinum Games (*Bayonetta*, *MadWorld*) and starring *Metal Gear Solid 2's* 'love him or hate him' hero Raiden, the game looks certain to divide fans of the franchise with its focus on sword combat and gloriously over-the-top action. Whatever critical reaction the game receives, it's sure to be a commercial hit, largely because the series seems to strike a chord with players all over the world. "I think people have always been attracted to *Metal Gear* because of its real-world settings, hard-boiled espionage action and unique characters," explains Ryan when asked about what makes the games so universally appealing. "Just as important as its creative elements has been its dedication to cutting-edge sound and graphics, I think people overlook the fact that the games have been hardware showcases and contributed a lot to their commercial success. My hope for the *Metal Gear* series is that it continues to take risks and innovate. I think the creative situation in Japan is dire and the country needs the *Metal Gear* series to be strong and healthy."

THE CLASSIC GAME

ZAXXON

Demanding keen dexterity, the careful minding of a fuel gauge, and a damn good aim, *Zaxxon* almost required partitioning of the brain to deal with all the information. Published by Sega, and co-developed with Japanese broadcast developer Ikegami Tsushinki, *Zaxxon* became one of the most popular shooters of the Eighties thanks to a landmark marketing campaign – it was the first arcade game to be advertised on television – and its famous isometric graphics. The latter not only helped it to stand out from the plethora of other shooters in arcades, but offered a whole new depth of visual immersion never really seen before.





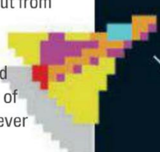
Enemy planes

These enemy fighters appear in the middle section of each level. Shoot down enough of them to earn point bonus.



Missile silos

This floating fortress is a deadly place. Not only is it full of brick wall barricades and electrified fences, but its terrain is littered with gun turrets and missile solos.



Player ship

This is your craft. Curiously, it looks more like a jet plane than a futuristic spaceship. It only has one means of attack and even that cannot be upgraded.



Gas tanks

Keep an eye on your depleting fuel. It can be topped up by firing at these gas canisters. If only refuelling at petrol stations was this simple.

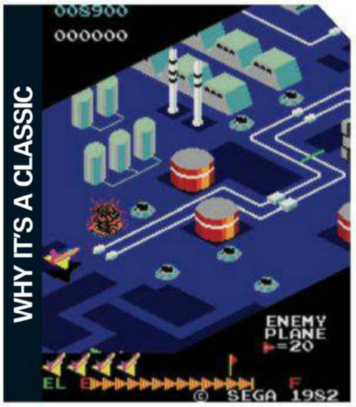


Zaxxon

Each level is split into three parts, ending with a battle with the eponymous Zaxxon. He has one method of attack and one weak spot. Both are located on his left arm.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

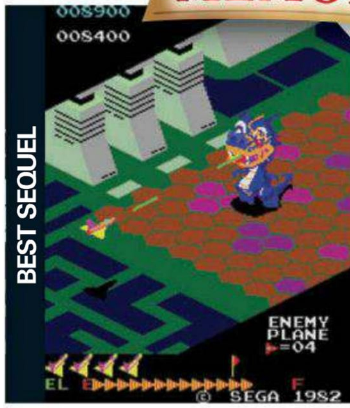
WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



It's pretty immersive

In the early Eighties most arcade shooters saw players evade and attack a phalanx of aerial targets in a dark and empty-feeling outer space. *Zaxxon*'s unique axonometric display gave its levels a real sense of visual pop and beauty, and helped players to feel fully immersed in its world. You would fight against your deadly environment and a heavily armed flying fortress, just as much the agile enemy ships and aggressive gun turrets. *Zaxxon* demanded keen dexterity and concentration from players, and very quickly became renowned for its challenge as much as its beauty.

BEST SEQUEL



Super Zaxxon

It was fairly common practice for arcade developers in the Eighties to save time and money by releasing updates of their hit arcade games rather than full sequels, titling them with the prefix 'Super'. Sega did this with *Hang-On* and *Zaxxon*. *Super Zaxxon* is essentially a more challenging version of the original, a *Zaxxon 1.5* with a few superficial tweaks. The main differences are that the player's ship moves faster, tunnel sections replace the dogfight parts, a two-player mode is introduced and a goofy dragon replaces the eponymous Zaxxon.



IN THE KNOW

- PLATFORM: ARCADE
- PUBLISHER: SEGA
- DEVELOPER: IN-HOUSE
- RELEASED: 1982
- GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP
- EXPECT TO PAY: £75 PCB

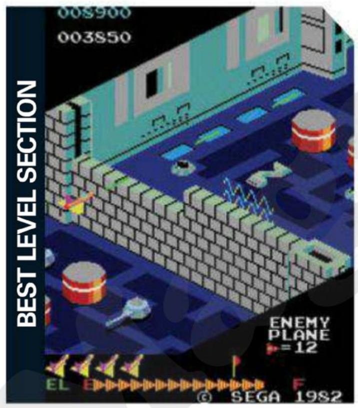
CLEVEREST FEATURE



Z axis: bold as love

In most shooters aiming and evading is done across movement on the X and Y-axis; in *Zaxxon* everything happens on the Z-axis (hence the Z in the title). Naturally this makes things trickier, as you have to be really precise with your aiming and shooting. An altimeter helps you judge your ship's position, but another good tactic is to use your ship's gunfire as a fail-safe means to guide it through dangers. If you fire your gun and the bullets hit a brick wall, you'll hit a brick wall; if they pass through a hole then so will you.

BEST LEVEL SECTION



The final raid

Zaxxon's levels are split into sections. The first is a raid over the enemy's base, and sees you dodging obstacles and avoiding fire from ground-to-air missiles and gun emplacements. The second section takes place in space, shooting down enemy fighters. Destroying a certain number awards you bonus points, as does hitting a roving satellite. Survive this, and the action returns to the base, but this time defences and security are on alert. Reach the end of this exasperating final gauntlet and you finally find out who this Zaxxon chap is.

What the press said… ages ago

IGN.com, 4.0

Playing *Zaxxon* is kind of like flying an X-Wing through the Death Star's trench in a *Star Wars* game – dodging obstacles, and blasting through barriers. But it's tough to handle with the isometric view.



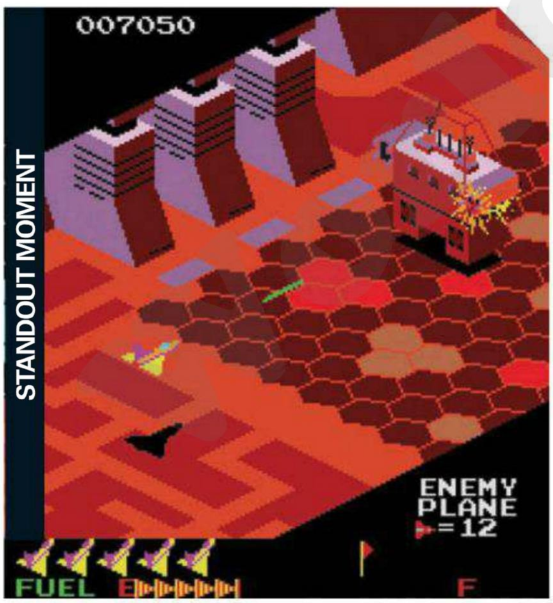
Crash, issue 14

Zaxxon must be called the arcade success story, a game which inspired many other 3D Games.

What we think

It may not have aged quite as well as some classic arcade games, but in 1982 *Zaxxon* was certainly doing innovative things for videogames and the shooter genre. If you like your games atmospheric, pretty and challenging, it still comes highly recommended.

STANDOUT MOMENT



Zaxxon

Well, fighting Zaxxon, obviously. The giant hovering droid might look like an ultramodern chest of drawers, but he can be fiddly to defeat. In keeping with the game's love of precise ship positioning, the battle is a frantic dash to get your craft in the appropriate position to blast his only weak spot, found on his left arm. If you're not quick, he'll launch a homing missile, which can be blown up or evaded (though doing either isn't easy). The trick is to get in there fast, and pummel him with shots. After six direct hits he turns red and explodes.

THE CONVERSIONS



Hit and miss

There are plenty of home conversions of *Zaxxon* and their quality varies wildly. It received official home computer ports for the C64, ZX Spectrum and MSX, and even an ambitious conversion for the TRS-80. On Atari 2600 and Intellivision the isometric 3D perspective got switched for an into-the-screen one instead. The result is a pretty good interpretation of the concept, but obviously these ports hold little to no nostalgic value. However, there are perfect conversions tucked away as extras on the *Sega Mega Drive Collection* and *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection*.


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a life on the



NAME: Mark Jones
AGE: 41
OCCUPATION: Was a computer graphic designer
WEBSITE: None
FAVOURITE OWN WORK: The Spectrum Wizball loading screen



NAME: Bill Harbison
AGE: 44
OCCUPATION: 3D artist
WEBSITE: None
FAVOURITE OWN WORK: Top Darts (PS3/Vita), Batman: The Movie (Amiga/ST)



NAME: Simon Butler
AGE: 54
OCCUPATION: Game artist/designer
WEBSITE: None
FAVOURITE OWN WORK: The Addams Family (SNES)

6 Central Street, Manchester. Once the address of the biggest name in British gaming. Here could be found the legendary Ocean Software, and inside its frenzied basement some of the best programmers, artists and musicians worked on the biggest licensed games and coin-op conversions. With insight from Gary Bracey, co-owner Jon Woods and a number of key staff, Stuart Hunt learns all about life on the Ocean wave

Retro Gamer: How did you land your job at Ocean and can you remember your first day?

Paul Hughes: I got my job through the C64 supremo Dave Collier. I visited Ocean to show some of my wares – the Freeload cassette mastering system, some off-the-wall tricks I'd come up with to stop the copy carts like Freeze Frame and Action Replay, and some stack-based sprite multiplexing. Dave was just finishing up *Terra Cresta* and at the end of the chat, quite out of the blue, he said, 'Can we offer this lad a job?' to Gary Bracey. My first day was on my 18th birthday, and to say I was in awe was an understatement – I met all the C64 big guns: Dave Collier, Martin Galway, Steve Wahid and Johnny Meegan; then the Z80 wizards: Joffa Smith, Mike Lamb and John 'Johnny Amstrad' Brandwood. I got dumped in a room with Joffa and a Commodore 128 dev kit, and just started getting some code together.

Simon Butler: I had done numerous jobs for Ocean prior to going in-house at Denton Designs – a short freelance period with coder Ian Weatherburn and then with Canvas, a company formed by Ian Weatherburn and Steve Cain. After Steve's departure from the management side of Canvas, the product began to suffer. Canvas produced a series of increasingly woeful titles and I became increasingly dissatisfied with matters and resigned. I then received a call from Gary Bracey asking me to come into the Central Street office for a talk; the result of that discussion was my first stint with Ocean. I can't actually remember the first day but I do remember being shown around the 'dungeons' after our talks. I met the team and was verbally harassed by Allan Shortt for being a scouser. It was the beginning of a long and highly enjoyable working relationship.

James Higgins: Well, my working career at Ocean initially started with me doing some contract work. At the time I'd just finished my Scottish Highers and was a bit of a bedroom programmer – socially inept full-time nerd, basically. Anyway, I'd called Ocean's offices and asked nervously to speak to Gary Bracey, and he listened to me stammer my way through Amstrad this and Amstrad that, but I could literally hear his ears prick up when I mentioned that I could program for the 6809 processor, the Motorola CPU used in the Dragon range. One thing led to another and I was on my way to the promised land. When I arrived, after a brief chat and a guided tour, I was on my way home with a Thomson MO5 (French computer), some docs in French, an ASM cartridge and a copy of *Green Beret* for the Spectrum. So that was my first job. I moved internally, although still on a



contract basis, to work on the Amstrad version of *Combat School*, and officially became an employee on the Amstrad version of *Arkanoid II*.

Bill Harbison: I used to regularly buy *Computer & Video Games* magazine to see previews of the exciting new arcade games that were going to be released. I owned a ZX Spectrum with a copy of The Artist II at the time, and I used to draw mock-ups of what they might look like if they were converted for the home computer market. I saved about half a dozen of these screens onto a cassette and sent them off to various software companies like Elite and US Gold with not much success. However, I sent my tape off to Ocean and got a letter from the graphics manager, Steve Wahid, saying they had received it and they'd be in touch soon. A year went by and still no word, so I sent another letter asking about my cassette, and within a couple of days I got a phone call from Lorraine Starr inviting me to Manchester for an interview. My first day at work was interesting. It was my programmer's first day too. We were called into Gary's office in the morning and told that we



dangers of getting into strangers' cars! No idea how Ocean got involved in that. I found it a few months back on World Of Spectrum, not having actually seen the program before, and it's rubbish!

RG: What was your very first project for Ocean?
JH: As I said, *Green Beret* on the Thomson MO5, TO7-70 and TO9. I think I had it up and running

"After a chat and a guided tour, I was on my way home with a Thomson MO5, some docs in French and a copy of Green Beret"

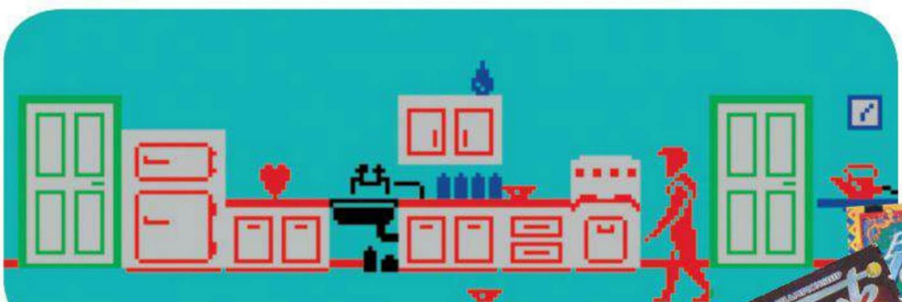
would be working on *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge*. So we headed off to our little corner of the building and thought, 'What do we do now? Where do we start?'

Mark Jones: My first day I was nervous as hell. As I had nowhere to live yet I was put up at a hotel on the Palatine Road, just up from what were the Factory Records offices. I remember I'd had quite a large cooked breakfast prior to leaving for work, then had to get on a smoky, student-crammed bus and, being stupidly nervous, had to jump off early as, 15 minutes into the journey, I felt really ill and thought I was about to vomit. I walked the rest of the way and was late for my first day. Everyone had a good laugh and I was forgiven. I was given a place to sit and furnished with a Spectrum 128 and a Microdrive and interface 1 to save whatever work I was doing on. The very first piece of work I was given was to make a loading screen for a piece of software written to warn youngsters about the

in about 12 weeks. When it was finished I'd only created it for the MO5 – no mention of the other SKU in the contract – when I got a call from Gary asking could I fly to Paris. It was my first time abroad and my first flight. Anyway, I get to the FIL offices in Paris and after pleasantries I'm in a room demoing the game. Everyone seemed happy enough… that is until they told me it had to work on these other systems. I agreed and was put back on a flight to Glasgow with a pile of hardware in tow and a polite letter in French for customs.

PH: My very first project was to do the C64 version of a *Dropzone*-a-like game idea that Joffa had on the Spectrum. It was going to be called *Newt* and it was his *Cobra* killer. Alas, nothing came of it, as Joffa was, unbeknownst to us, just a few weeks away from leaving and forming Special FX with Paul Finnegan, so the game soon got canned. It did rear its head in a simpler form several years later as a giveaway on a magazine, renamed *Hyper*





Number crunching

Gary oversaw the development of more than **104** games for Ocean

Gary joined Ocean in **1985** as software manager. He was initially paid a salary of **£13,000** a year

Between the years **1983** and **1992**, coin-op conversions and licensed games accounted for more than **50 per cent** of Ocean's 8-bit output

The woeful *Highlander* scored **57 per cent** in *Crash*

In **1994**, Ocean grew its business by purchasing rival software house Imagine

At the end of its first financial year, Ocean had a turnover of **£500,000**. By **1998**, this number had risen to an estimated **£10 million**

The Spectrum version of *RoboCop* placed number **94** in *Your Sinclair*'s top **100** games list. The reader equivalent saw it climb to the number **9** spot

Following its purchase, in **1998** Ocean was renamed Infogrames UK

Ocean was one of the few developers to release games for the ill-fated **GX4000**

The last game developed by Ocean to see release was the N64 game *Mission: Impossible* in **1998**

Ocean was acquired by French game company Infogrames in 1996 for a reported **$100 million**



Active, with Joffa doing the Spectrum version and Tony Pomfret doing a C64 version. My first shipped project for Ocean/Imagine, much to my eternal embarrassment, was *Mag Max* on the C64. It just sucked. Graphically, Simon did a great job on a title that shouldn't have been put on a C64, as the arcade hardware was a 68000 processor with 128 sprites on a line, and every one of the 200 horizontal scan lines could scroll individually, forming a lovely parallax effect. Other than the arcade game looking pretty, it sucked as a game, so in that regard I did a great port.

SB: I think the very first thing they asked me to do was a loading screen for *Match Day*, but my first in-house project was the C64 version of *Mag Max* with Paul.

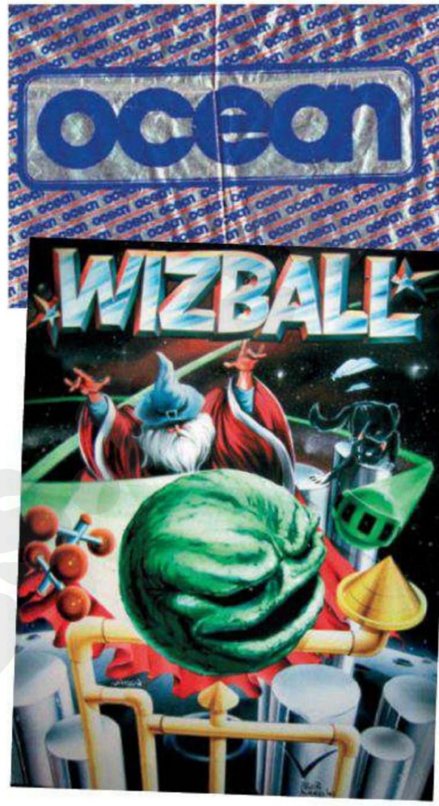
MJ: That was the Spectrum conversion of *Wizball* on the Spectrum. When I started in January 1987, about a third of the Commodore 64 version had been written, so the Sensible Software guys would send along a new version every couple of weeks so we could see how it was coming along. I should have kept those disks! So it was nearly written alongside the 64 version. We were just a bit behind. But then the game itself got more behind, and then more behind. Then I'd finished my graphics, the 64 version was finished and the Spectrum version was looking like it was nowhere near finished. Then the programmer just didn't turn up one morning, never to be seen by anyone at Ocean again, and the Spectrum code had to be finished off by Paul Owens. Finishing off someone else's game code is not an easy task, I'm led to believe, so it's pretty amazing there is a Spectrum version at all, albeit a pale imitation of the great C64 version.

RG: What was the culture at Ocean like?

PH: It was hard work, but we had a real laugh developing the games, and I think that shone through in the products we produced in the late Eighties and early Nineties. Like anywhere, occasionally tempers got frayed, but the in-house team just wanted to make the best games that were technically possible on each of the platforms. It was a great culture, everyone trying to raise the technical bar whilst brainstorming and generously sharing their ideas. There were many late nights, many parties and many drinking sessions in the Square Albert and Tommy Ducks.

JH: It was really hard as a newcomer to fit in initially. The newer hires were definitely eyed suspiciously by the old guns, but after a while they softened their hardened exteriors. I would say it was fairly cliquey too – there were definitely factions. I was pretty shy to begin with, and although there wasn't a huge age gap – I was a little younger than some of the veterans there – it's a world of difference in terms of maturity and experience when you're fresh out of school. I spent several years there anxious I was about to be found out and sent packing once they discovered I didn't have a clue. But after that it was mostly great. I was one of the veterans at that point and had made some very good friends.

SB: It was disorganised and slightly chaotic to the untrained eye in some ways, yet it functioned



» *Wizball*, developed for Ocean by Sensible Software, was named game of the decade by *Zzap!64*

The Imaginarium of Ocean

Gary Bracey explains Ocean's association with Imagine

RG: How did the purchase of Imagine come about?

Gary Bracey: To the best of my recollection, the story goes that there was a *Commercial Breaks* TV show. Some documentary makers went into Imagine when Imagine were going bust, and they filmed the whole disintegration of that company, while also filming Ocean as Ocean was on the rise. However, a few years before there had been another documentary about Imagine and talked about those 'upstart Liverpool guys', and it was that programme that inspired Jon and David to start in that business. So Imagine in the very, very early days inspired Jon Woods and David Ward to start Spectrum Games, which later became Ocean.

The irony was, when Imagine closed they saw an opportunity because, although the products were on the wane from that company at the time, the brand was very, very well known. Particularly because of all the controversy over the bankruptcy and the highly paid bedroom programmers, it was very high-profile. Ocean wanted a separate brand for the coin-op conversions and Imagine fitted very well with that. Another relevant aspect is the person who ran the PR for Imagine was also doing the PR for Ocean, and I think there might have been some influence there. Overall, I think the rationale worked out pretty well because Ocean was still in its early days and was yet to really cement its own name and brand in the market, so acquiring a ready-made, identifiable brand made a lot of sense.



RG: How did the two companies co-operate with one another following the acquisition?

GB: The two companies didn't interact at all. What happened was Imagine had gone bust and out of business, so there was no relationship between the two companies. Ocean approached the liquidators and said they would purchase the name. There was no co-operation, nor any IP acquisition. There were no games taken over; it was purely the label and the brand only.





exceptionally well. I think the main reason for it being so productive was the fact that it was an era where it wasn't just seen as being 'a job'. People were genuinely doing something they were passionate about. The basement in Central Street, Manchester, was madness at times. There was always something going on, some hi-jinks or general tomfoolery, and I must admit that for a great part of it I was involved in one way or another. The people were great; the atmosphere was, for the most part, just one big family. Voices were raised and sometimes the fur flew. Again, I will admit to being one of many culprits here, but overall it was an atmosphere I had never experienced before or since and I genuinely miss it.

RG: What is your best memory of Ocean?

PH: There were many, many stand-out moments, but the proudest, I guess, was one year – I think it was around '88 or '89 – we were at the office Christmas party and we were looking at the Christmas charts, and if I recall correctly Ocean/ Imagine had eight or nine of the top ten sellers slots. It was a remarkable achievement, and the champagne flowed! Looking back, having so many incredibly smart and talented individuals in one building was a testament to the pull of Ocean. I'll always look back on those days with fond memories.

JH: There's a lot of good memories. Probably the best, though, was the trip to New York with Gary and Warren Lancashire to visit DC Comics to discuss a *Lobo* game. Anyway, Carnegie Deli, helicopter flight, Empire State, a swanky downtown hotel where I got to eat the best eggs benedict I've ever tasted.

For the most part, the day-to-day grind of getting the job done didn't make for that many eventful memories. I had a great stripogram – must find those pictures. I remember Johnny Meegan running a mile from his – I think Steve Thompson stepped in, though I don't remember why. Probably a birthday. I remember the *Equinox* people ambushing me with a question about videogame violence and having a camera six inches from my face. There are other memories, some of which I could have been fired over, but it's a family magazine.

> "Voices were raised and sometimes the fur flew, but overall it was an atmosphere I had never experienced before or since"

SB: I can honestly say my best memory is the simple fact that I was part of Ocean. Regardless of the merits, if such exist, of any titles I worked on, I just enjoyed working with that group of people during those early years of the industry. Of course, we did some ludicrous things and there were times when the basement seemed more like a madhouse than a games studio, but things like that were just icing on the cake. I was part of something that was exciting and new and a challenge on an almost daily basis, and nothing like that will happen again.

MJ: Well, we had some great laughs. Cheesy as it may sound, the great sense of humour down there in the dungeons helped shape who I am today. I was 16. I was still turning into me. So that rubbed off on me a lot. And seeing a game come to completion and then reading the reviews in the magazines, which 90 per cent of the time for me were good ones. That was exciting. Being reviewed and having your name in the magazines you'd read yourself at school as a Spectrum user was pretty special. I had one or two bad reviews, but who doesn't? And when Keith Chegwin came down and made an insert for a kids' programme he was doing and interviewed me for it, that was good, though it took me a good ten years to be able to watch it back again without squirming.

BH: My best memory was when we decided to make our own alien invasion movie. We had a scary mask and for about a month ran around Castlefield in Manchester with a video camera, filming a badly written script I had written. I was the director and got to boss everyone around. We had big plans for it. We were going to do all the special effects in CGI, but unfortunately we never got to finish it. I still have all the raw footage we filmed, but it'll stay under lock and key so as not to embarrass anyone.

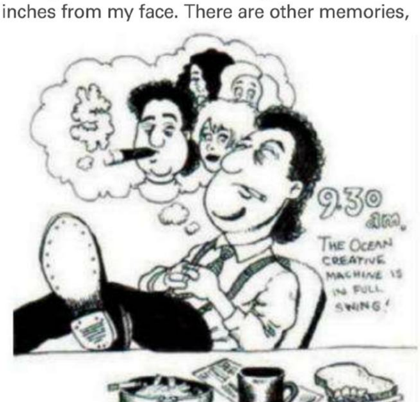
RG: Was there any kind of competition between the in-house teams to work on the best licences?

PH: You always wanted to work on the best licences, and you could certainly express a preference to Gary, but Gary always had a feel for who would be best to deal with a certain IP, be it an arcade conversion or a movie tie-in. Generally speaking, all the best licences came in-house, as the internal teams were a safe set of hands.

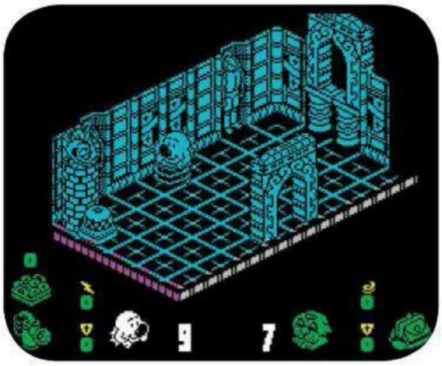
SB: I wouldn't say that there was any concerted competition as such. Obviously people would want to work on a prestige licence, but if you didn't get it then that was an end to the matter. There were grumblings and mutterings of preferential treatment and certain people being 'teacher's pet', but what can you expect from a bunch of kids barely out of their teens?

RG: Was it ever disheartening working on so many licensed games and coin-op conversions, or was it exciting to be working on recognisable properties?

JH: In the early days, not at all. All of this stuff was cool. We actually made some original stuff – *The Vindicator* was all original work, originally tagged *Green Beret 2*. Arcade conversions were probably the worst stuff we had to do because they were the most challenging, although some astounding work was done on those systems. Even movie tie-ins like *The Addams Family* were so loosely based on the movies they felt like original works.



» **Bill Harbison has vivid memories of Gary Bracey's creative process at the height of Ocean's success.**



BH: Personally I enjoyed working on licensed games and coin-op conversions; it meant that you were under pressure to do a good job and not disappoint the fans of the source material. It also meant that your work was being exposed to a wider audience than an original title would.

SB: Licences brought so many restrictions from movie studios and conversions were a chore because, right from the get-go, you knew the feckless press would pounce on you if your version was one iota different from the coin-op original. But these problems became challenges that you had to overcome, so you saw teams doing some really cool things with the meagre tools at their disposal. Certainly, a high-profile movie tie-in would garner press attention, but in the big scheme of things once the game was done, it was business as usual and on to the next project. There was never any time to bask in the glory of the media, and the kudos was always directed upstairs to the guys in suits anyhow – no sour grapes, honest! It's only nowadays at retro conventions that you meet your fans and they make you aware that this title or that project was a big deal.

MJ: Not for me. I worked on two original games, two coin-op conversions and two film licences in the main. It was evened out for me. You did hear other people sometimes tut and remark under their breath, eyes rolled upwards, when certain possible licences were mentioned. But then you can see why there were licences aplenty. Hypothetically compare the sales figures of the 64 version of *Wizball* and the 64 version of *RoboCop*. I'm taking a good guess that there would be no comparison. If people went out and bought original games then that's what would have been produced. David Ward and Jon Woods were businessmen whose aim was to make money. If people didn't want games of film licences then they shouldn't have gone out and bought them in their droves.

RG: What was the relationship like between external freelancers and in-house staff?
PH: We didn't really have too many dealings with the freelancers, but we could be cuttingly critical of some of the poor conversions that came through the doors, and occasionally we'd offer up solutions to help out – Mike Lamb came up with the track routine that ended up in the externally developed Spectrum *WEC Le Mans*, for example. That said, Ocean had a great team of reliable external



A moment with Jon Woods and Gary Bracey

Ocean's co-owner and software manager share their memories

RG: How did you come to be acquaintances with David Ward and what made you decide to enter the games industry together with Ocean Software?
JW: I'd known David Ward since we were both about 17. We'd been in business together in the rag trade. We experienced hard times and good times and so we came to this business with a bit of experience. We were determined at the time and knew we had hit on something and not to blow it.

RG: And how knowledgeable were you and David about computers and videogames at the time?
JW: Nothing at all. It was purely publishing and marketing, and knowing how to go and get it, so to speak.

RG: Did you ever expect Ocean to be as successful as it was?
JW: The business had been a hula-hoop for a long time and then all of a sudden it wasn't. We never knew how long it was going to last. You were reliant, obviously, on changes in hardware and you had to adapt. Obviously it is a business, but you didn't know that in 1984, or even '86. You just didn't know.

RG: Why do you think Ocean struggled to establish itself on newer systems following the Amiga and ST scene?
GB: The big boys came in and the big corporates with heavy funding were able to throw vast amounts of money on getting licences, and then, of course, it put the whole industry into a different league. And, of course, being from the UK, it was always very difficult to compete.

RG: At what point did you think that Ocean's best days had passed?
JW: Ocean's best times were the Eighties because you could do anything, but once you get into the Nineties and the cartridge business it became a different industry.



» Gary Bracey

RG: What are some of your fondest memories of Ocean?
JW: There are too many, countless. Securing the *Jurassic Park* licence is one of them.

GB: The awards that we won, the games we got great reviews for, the parties, the fantastic friends I made. It was truly life-changing.

RG: What is your favourite Ocean game and why?
GB: [Directed at Jon] Did you ever play any?

[They laugh]

JW: The most significant was *Daley Thompson* because without that we wouldn't have made that jump.

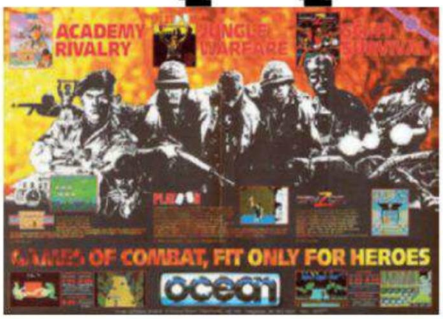
GB: For personal reasons, I guess *RoboCop*, as that was the first big movie licence I was involved with from the beginning, so that was very dear to my heart. In terms of movie licences, I loved *The Untouchables*, *Batman* and *The Addams Family*.

RG: Why do you feel Ocean is so fondly remembered by gamers today?
JW: I think it's the era.

GB: And also because games were starting to be popular. For the first time they were integral to growing up. So I think it's looked back with a fondness because it was part of people's childhoods. Back then it was magical and a few pixels made Batman. Now you just can't compare it to today's graphics. It's the silent movie era of videogames.









» [C64] The original version of *Wizball*, on the C64, was harder than later versions, which were tweaked for balancing reasons.

developers that you could always bet the house on. The likes of Jon Ritman, Sensible, Painting By Numbers, Nick Sheard and Peter Johnson always delivered.

JH: Pretty awful, truth be told. Internals used to line up to poke fun at the stuff that turned up. I mean there was the occasional decent freelance work, but a lot of it was mediocre – *It's A Knockout*, *Highlander*… There were some guys everyone respected, though. Ritman, Nick Sheard…

SB: Well, I started my Ocean relationship as a freelancer and never really noticed anything untoward on the few times I visited their offices. It was very obvious that they were a tight-knit group. But once I was part of that team and freelancers came in, it never bothered me at all and I never knew of anyone who took exception to outsiders. Having said that, there was one team that put my teeth on edge, and while the old Simon would have shouted their names from the rooftops, age has mellowed me somewhat, so I shall say no more. The very thought of them gave me the shudders.

RG: How important was Gary Bracey's contribution to Ocean's success?

JH: Gary who? No, all kidding aside, his contribution was enormous. But at the time I had no idea. We were all so wrapped up in our own worlds that I didn't really see the bigger picture. I mean, he was basically running the lunatic asylum. To keep that machine ticking over and stop all of the crazies from killing each other was no mean feat. Although his right-hand woman, Lorraine, was a big part in smoothing ruffled feathers. Of course, I know nothing of what else Gary contributed once he was upstairs, wheeling and dealing with Ward and Woods.

BH: Gary was an integral part of the renaissance of Ocean. He was, and still is, a huge fan of movies, and this is where the company changed forever. He went for big, blockbuster licences and it was quite a thrill to know you were working on something that was going to be special. As soon as he decided to move on to other things, it was the end of Ocean.

MJ: He obviously knew what he was doing and did it very well, otherwise I wouldn't still be talking about it 25 years later. He put together a killer team downstairs at 6 Central Street, one I had to pinch myself that I was a part of. To have a team of people like that is not just down to coincidence. He came in at the tail end of that *Street Hawk*/*Shite Rider* [*Knight Rider*] period and turned it around completely. Read the magazines and the reviews Ocean were getting during the second part of 1986. There were letters from people moaning about the lateness and quality of Ocean products. The games were getting marks around the 45% to 60% mark. It wasn't good then for Ocean. Then, in 1988, less than two years later, Ocean was getting, in the main, fantastic reviews in all the magazines. They were being awarded 'software house of the year' awards and the like. It was amazing. Ocean Software dominated that late Eighties period. No one came close. They were everywhere. Gary was a big part of that complete turnaround.

"Gary was running the asylum. To keep that machine ticking over and stop all of the crazies from killing each other was no mean feat"

Where are they now?

AFTER OCEAN, GARY Bracey helped establish Telstar Electronics Studios, the videogame development/publishing arm of Telstar Records. When the division was later sold to Take 2 in 1999, Gary established Digimask, a company founded on innovative facial capture technology. The tech was used by Disney and Universal, and was also incorporated into Ubisoft's *Rainbow Six Vegas* series. Gary's most recent venture is PeelZone, a company that uses automated software to allow people to customise their gadgets.



Following his time at Ocean, James Higgins moved to the US, where he worked for a company called Paradox on the 32X version of *Blackthorne*. He then returned to the UK and set up the company Sourcery Development Ltd, which developed one title in *Asterix: The Gallic War*. In 2000, James returned to the US to work for Left Field Productions (*Excitebike 64*), formed by fellow Ocean colleagues Mike Lamb and John Brandwood.

Paul Hughes joined Electronic Arts, which, at the time of his leaving, had just established a base in the UK. Paul worked on a number of games for the studio, including *Privateer 2*, *Darklight Conflict* and *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*. Today he can be found at TT Games as a technical director, helping to put the pieces together for the popular *Lego* games.

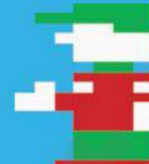




Simon Butler and Bill Harbison are still working in the games industry. Simon has been doing assorted graphics work for a number of European developers, and is currently working on a series of browser titles for a company based in Germany. For the last three years, Bill has been working as a self-employed 3D modeller for Sega and Sony. Currently, he can be found at Devil's Details in Sheffield, where he is hard at work on some upcoming PS Vita projects. Next year will mark his 25th year in the business.



Ocean's final wave

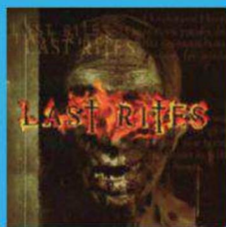


Some of the games developed and published by Ocean in its twilight years



ZERO DIVIDE
Year: 1996

Developed by Zoom (*Phalanx*), *Zero Divide* was one of the better attempts at sticking robots in a fighting game. It featured eight pugilists battling it out to prevent a hacker from releasing sensitive files. The story's naff but it did boast nice visuals, cool characters, fluid animation and bonus mini-games.



LAST RITES
Year: 1997

This obscure *Duke Nukem 3D*-alike's plot centres on your efforts to save humanity following a nasty outbreak of zombitis. You play the leader of an elite special forces unit, and, working alongside AI-controlled soldiers, your mission was to venture into the infected areas and eradicate the walking dead.



WETRIX
Year: 1998

This superb twist on *Tetris* by John and Ste Pickford's Zed Two tasked players with managing a plot of floating land that is under constant threat from flooding. Your main objective was to create dams and lakes to contain falling water and prevent it from draining away. This was achieved through the careful laying of various 3D blocks that reshaped the form of your land mass.



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE
Year: 1998

Although this tie-in faced its own impossible mission of stepping out of *GoldenEye*'s shadow, *Mission: Impossible* proved a worthy adaptation. A third-person action title that required players to use stealth, gadgets and cunning over guns, the result played like a mix of *Syphon Filter* and *Hitman*. It's fitting that this, the last game developed by Ocean, was a movie licence.



GT 64: CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION
Year: 1998

The final Ocean-published game was a woeful racer based on Japan's GT Championship. The franchise originally appeared on the Super Famicom, but this late N64 sequel by Imagineer did nothing. It was criticised for its fuzzy visuals, lack of tracks and stuttering animation, making it a sad swan song for the legendary Ocean.

SB: Vital, I would say. He became the face of Ocean Software to an extent. While David and Jon were obviously at the helm, Gary was everywhere making sure that Ocean got the best teams, the best licences, and the best coverage. He was the Simon Cowell of the games industry in a roundabout way. He smoothed ruffled egos, he made sure everyone knew what they were doing and kept abreast of how things were progressing. We had our differences at times, but he had a lot to put up with from me and all the other monkeys in the Ocean basement, and at the end of the day he was as much a part of the creation of those games as the teams themselves.

PH: I've always said that Ocean was a well-oiled machine – Jon and David certainly knew how to run a profitable business, but history has seriously downplayed Gary's role in the success of not only Ocean, but of the industry itself. He was the guy that spotted the raw talent that saw potential in a product pitch that no one else could see. He virtually single-handedly drove the acquisition of every single key movie IP we developed. Although I left Ocean just before Gary moved on, I firmly believe that once he had gone, the heart and soul of the company went with him, and from that day on, Ocean's days were numbered. Without someone like that at the helm, it was almost inevitable that the ship would steer off course, especially as, by the mid-Nineties, development costs had skyrocketed, and one bad game could finish a company off.

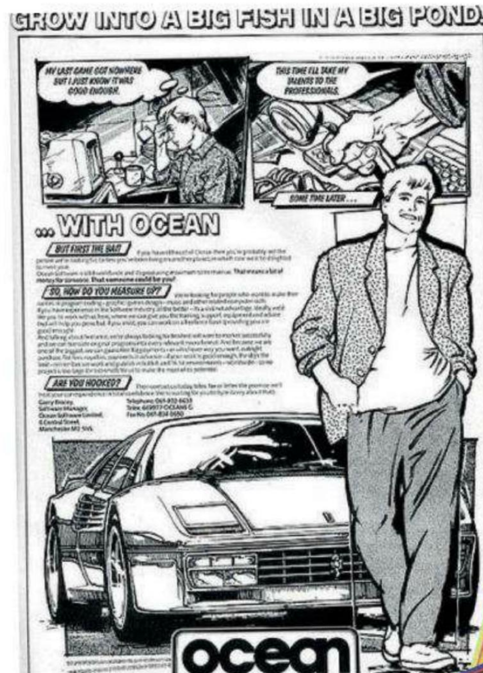
RG: At what point did you feel Ocean's best days had passed and it was time to move on?

JH: I think I actually exited before Ocean went south. Systems were getting more and more complex, team sizes larger, and the games being produced were increasingly lauded with ridiculous promised features and depth. For me, it was a simple financial issue. I was able to make a lot more with the new American money that was enticing Brit developers overseas. The exodus was kicked off by… maybe they should remain nameless… and soon many of the veterans started to follow. In part, though, Ocean did sort of shoot themselves in the foot by establishing Ocean America and then relocating the Painting By Numbers team, a great external developer from Sheffield. We all wanted to go to California at that point.

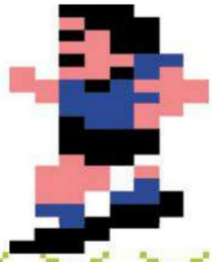
PH: I didn't particularly move on because I believed the best days had passed. Ocean were at the top of our game, they were successful on the 16-bit consoles and were making inroads into the fledgling console business. For me, development was plainly becoming about developing reusable core technology; from the late Eighties I had been tinkering with 3D engines and coming up with shared common code libraries to ease development. This was more the avenue I wanted to go down, and there wasn't really a place for that at Ocean at the time. Electronic Arts had just set up in the UK and were after exactly that kind of people to drive the new interactive 3D titles, so I jumped at it.

SB: I left Ocean for the first time to move into 16-bit development because I was burned out with shoebox-sized pixels or eight colours on screen at

» The famous 'sports car' advert that attracted many young coders to apply for a job at Ocean. If the chance to work in the games industry wasn't attractive enough, a Ferrari and a makeover by Don Johnson's stylists surely sealed the deal.







a time. Then circumstances conspired on a title some time after that and I found myself working externally on an Ocean product that was so screwed that I stepped in to help salvage matters and wound up back full-time in the old office. After this, Ocean moved into their new offices and it was round about this time that I noticed the differences. The whole setup had become more corporate, and the homespun 'cottage industry' feel of the development side of things had gone. It had lost its heart and become a money-making machine, which to the guys at the top is the sole reason for having a business, but for me the sparkle had gone. I still enjoyed what I was doing, but with teams expanding at an almost daily rate and new faces appearing in every department, it was too big to have that old connection with the teams. The matter of moving on was not actually my decision, as I was dismissed under circumstances that to this day have never been truly explained. But it's all water under the bridge and I doubt it would have been much longer before I had walked out under my own steam.

RG: Finally, why do you feel Ocean is so fondly remembered by gamers today?
PH: I think it's because they broke the mould. They officially licensed coin-ops, and did most of them justice, and were the first to really try and make a game out of a film licence. Gary had a real knack for finding a stonking script where others would just dismiss it. They were the first real 'glossy' publisher – proper marketing, PR, merchandising and, importantly, great, great software. Imagine started the ball rolling but didn't have the likes of Jon, David and Gary at the helm to make it ultimately successful. Once Ocean was in its stride, it took a cottage industry and turned it into the global entertainment business it is today.

JH: Ocean was in the right place and the right time. We did some decent games – and some stinkers too – but if you were a kid and into computers, Ocean was part of your youth. Ocean made that impact through powerful marketing and being associated with the biggest brands of the Eighties and Nineties.

SB: I think that Ocean is truly remembered for their 8-bit titles and for the simple fact that they did, for the most part, develop some very entertaining games. Before the expansion truly began, when they were still a 'small' team, they turned out a string of hit titles that meant a lot to a generation







The Mini Making Of...
The Great Escape

With Bob Wakelin's stunning cover art for the game emblazoned across our cover this month, we caught up with Denton Designs' John Heap to ask him about the development of one of Ocean's best ever published titles, *The Great Escape*.

Retro Gamer: Was *The Great Escape* an official licence?
John Heap: No. It was a completely standalone game.

RG: How long did the game engine take to create?
JH: It took about three months. Dave Ward, MD of Ocean, came around about that time, quite possibly slightly concerned about the lack of progress. He still looked concerned when he saw the main character walking around a monochrome screen. However, when I moved behind a dormitory hut, he was all smiles again.

RG: What was the biggest technical challenge in making the game?
JH: The main problem was managing memory use against processing time. I would have liked the update to have been quicker, but the outside environment was quite complex, so needed a lot of tokenisation, which slowed things down.

RG: Why didn't the game's main character have a name?
JH: He didn't need one. He was representative of many thousands who spent time in POW camps.

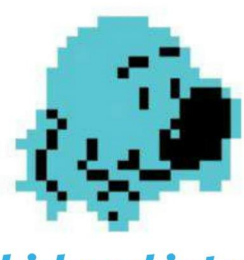
RG: Why choose the isometric viewpoint?
JH: When we were talking to publishers early on, someone from Mirrorsoft asked if it was in 3D. It wasn't going to be but that started me thinking. I had been impressed with [*3D Ant Attack*] a year or so earlier, so I did some test code and went isometric. This was before I'd seen *Knight Lore* from Ultimate Play The Game, though that came out well before I'd finished *The Great Escape*, which was a little upsetting, as it was brilliantly executed.

RG: How difficult was it to create the AI for the prison guards?
JH: It wasn't that difficult. They all followed a basic rules system, and the games I'd written previously, *Shadowfire* and *Enigma Force*, already had route-following AI. The only new thing was object avoidance and a line of sight. The guards would only notice you if they looked in your direction.

RG: Where did the idea of having to fit into a daily routine come from?
JH: Life. Everybody does it, POW or not. The idea of your life energy being your morale worked really well. You try so hard, keep getting knocked back, and eventually you give up.

RG: Were there any ideas that didn't appear in the final game?
JH: The idea of an escape by glider was booted out very early on. It was a pity that the internals had to be so sparse. Just not enough memory.





of kids. I've met people in France and Germany who get all of a dither when they learn I worked for Ocean. They were the total package; they had the name, the profile, the best artwork on the boxes, and the music was some of the best around. They were the hit-makers. People remember the things that meant a lot to them in their youth. Ocean was a massive part of the industry, and the industry was something that took over a whole generation. The novelty factor was also a great part of it; the industry was new, and nothing like it had been seen before. It was the start of something that no one could have predicted, and it was the latest thing. Every kid wanted a home computer, and the wars rage between the C64 and Spectrum owners to this very day. What now seems quaint and quirky if you remove your rose-tinted spectacles did seem cutting-edge at the time, and Ocean rode the crest of that wave. They worked hard to get that profile and it was well deserved. Thankfully, I was there for a great part of it.

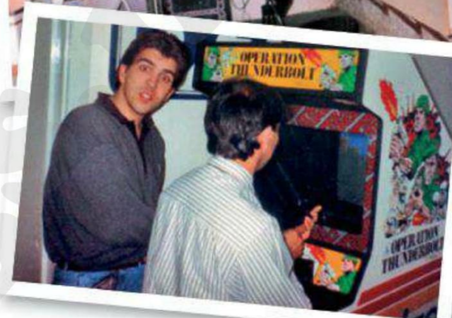
MJ: Because, despite the seemingly endless licences, they were so massive and so in your face back then, and, more importantly, at the heart of the company, there were people that cared about the games being produced. We'd all been games players as kids. Those Ocean games were being played by kids all over the world. We didn't see any of that back then. Now, with the internet, you realise that people were playing *Gryzor* on their Spectrums in Poland and Spain! And it's, like, with my dad, it was train sets. The train set would get put away as he grew up but then, at a certain age, it would come out again and get set up in the spare room. The Spectrum is like one of those train sets of my generation. People are getting Spectrums again off well-known auction sites and setting them up. Or running emulators on their PCs – you don't actually need a Spectrum any more. Everyone has a PC – that's all you need – and firing up these games and remembering parts of their childhood again. It's bringing it all back round full circle. And it's amazing. I didn't have a clue back then in 1987 that I'd be talking about it all still 25 years later.

> "If you were a kid and into computers, Ocean was part of your youth. It made that impact through association with the biggest brands"

Special thanks to Bill Harbison and Mark Jones for their help with the imagery and photos used in this feature, and Andy Wareing for supplying us with *The Great Escape* art.



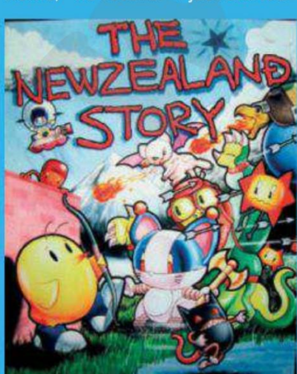
» The famous arcade alley, where Ocean stored all the arcade machines and PCBs sent to assist with the conversion process.



The Wakelin factor

ASIDE FROM ITS heavy reliance on film and TV licences, there was another easy way of recognising Ocean's games: namely the glorious Bob Wakelin artwork that featured on the covers of most of its key releases.

Eager to speak to the man whose art adorns our front cover this month, we were keen to discover how Wakelin first decided he wanted to be an artist. "When I was a kid, I was asthmatic and therefore was frequently stuck at home," he recalls. "I just started drawing a lot, as well as reading comics and books, and as my health improved, the love of drawing stayed with me. As I was only really any good at art and English, and my other interest, astronomy, needed at least some capacity for mathematics, my destiny seemed pretty obvious!"



With Bob well and truly bitten by the art bug, it wasn't long before he started looking for work. A chance meeting with an artist acquaintance soon led to him working with one of the UK's biggest software houses.

"I knew an artist who I'd bump into occasionally around town," continues Bob about the fortuitous meeting. "We decided to try working on a couple of ideas together and he started coming around to my place. It was becoming apparent that the whole thing was going nowhere when he told me about 'these two guys who were looking for box artists for their games'. He arranged for us to meet up with Dave Ward at his flat in Liverpool and we knocked out a couple of jobs for him. He seemed pretty happy with them, but the other artist struggled to meet deadlines and maintain the standard of his first couple of pieces, so he went bye-bye. I felt guilty and had him helping on the next few covers, but he became totally unreliable and we parted company."



Bob continued to find work with Ocean on a freelance basis, often having lunch with Steve Blower, and continued to deliver some truly stunning covers, including *The Great Escape*, *Gryzor*, *Wizball*, *The New Zealand Story*, *Rainbow Islands* and many more. Interestingly, though, despite how well his work captured the games it was based on, he rarely had access to the games themselves.

"I had very little [access]. I used to see a demo occasionally, or get screenshots, or even just a verbal description. I didn't need to see anything if it was a golf, football, sports or war game, but it helped, if there was a specific look to certain characters, to actually see what I was supposed to be doing."

Much of Bob's work is now available to buy in various forms from his website at **www.bobwakelin.com**, although not all his art is available, as some of it was destroyed by Ocean back in the Eighties, including his excellent *The Great Escape* cover. It's an incident that Bob recalls feeling "very, very angry" about, but he remains pleased by the sheer amount of interest that his distinctive artwork continues to generate from those who remember the games.

"I was amazed when I first became aware of all the interest in my old stuff," he admits. "I shoved all the art in a box and forgot about it. Occasionally someone would contact me and buy a piece, but I never thought there were more than a handful of people who remembered my box art. Yep. Big surprise."



The Ocean connection



The best Ocean games and the companies and individuals that were involved

Individuals

JON RITMAN

Batman
A superb isometric adventure, which not only introduced gamers to the pixel art of Bernie Drummond, but also proved that *Batman* made a viable videogame licence.

Head Over Heels
The second isometric Ocean offering by the dynamic duo was another class act. Character swapping, great visuals, surreal enemies and some fiendish puzzles made *Head Over Heels* a massive hit for Ocean and turned its two creators into legends.



Match Day II
As good as *Match Day* was, its superior sequel left it standing. Excellent graphics, intelligent players and the dynamic kickometer all combined to create one of the best pre-*Sensible Soccer* football games.

Other Jon Ritman games
- *Match Day*
- *International Match Day*

THE PICKFORD BROTHERS

Wetrix
A novel twist on the frantic response puzzle game. Your aim was to contain falling water droplets by reshaping a mass of land. One of Ocean's best published games.



BOB WAKELIN

He didn't make any games, but Bob Wakelin's distinctive art could be found on many of Ocean's biggest and most popular games. Significant pieces include *The Great Escape, Where Time Stood Still, Wizball, Hyper Sports, Gryzor* and *Rainbow Islands*.

DALEY THOMPSON

Daley Thompson's Decathlon
The first of three games to star the multi gold-medal-winning decathlete, *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* was Ocean's first big hit. A joystick-abusing classic inspired by *Track & Field*.

Other Daley Thompson games
- *Daley Thompson's Supertest*
- *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge*

Developers

SPECIAL FX

Midnight Resistance
Special FX only worked on three arcade conversions – *Toki* wasn't released – but the quality of each was very good. *Midnight Resistance* was by far the best, with the Spectrum and 16-bit outings capturing all the carnage of Irem's original game.



Batman: The Caped Crusader
Ocean's second *Batman* game was another huge hit. Great graphics, a dynamic comic-strip style and genuinely clever puzzles ensured Special FX's game captured the spirit of DC Comics' flagship hero.



Firefly
Many of Special FX's games were quite innovative and

DENTON DESIGNS

Where Time Stood Still
Denton's impressive isometric engine allowed players to frolic free in an expansive lost world, complete with deadly dinosaurs, angry natives and stunning scenery.

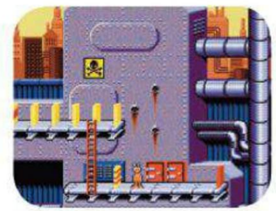
Frankie Goes To Hollywood
One of the most unusual games of the 8-bit era. A journey of self-enlightenment triggered by a murder, with object-based puzzles, mini-games and music references.

Eco: A Game Of Survival
An unusual but imaginative game in which you must carefully eat, breed and adapt to survive and gradually ascend the evolutionary ladder to become human.



The Great Escape
Denton Designs' fantastic isometric adventure was a stunning piece of work from John Heap that proved there was still plenty of life in the well-worn isometric genre.

Other Denton Designs games



game for Ocean. So much so it became a pack-in with the A600, as part of The Wild, The Weird & The Wicked Pack.

Other Red Rat games
- *One Step Beyond Featuring Colin Curly*
- *Wild Wheels*

DIGITAL IMAGE DESIGN

F-29 Retaliator
Ocean didn't dabble too often in the flight sim genre, but it didn't have to when it had this excellent effort. Cutting-edge visuals, heart-pounding missions and dynamic gameplay turned *F-29 Retaliator* into a huge hit.

Other Digital Image Design games
- *Epic*
- *RoboCop 3*

SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

Wizball
This horizontal shooter was unique, wonderfully playable, full of character, and looked great. It's one of the most original and well-regarded titles Ocean ever published.

Firefly was no exception. It's an interesting shooter that combines puzzle elements with maze-like layouts to create a very strategic game.

Other Special FX games
- *Cabal*
- *Gutz*
- *Hudson Hawk*
- *Red Heat*
- *RoboCop 2* (16-bit)
- *The Untouchables* (16-bit)

- *Gift From The Gods*
- *Cosmic Wartoad*
- *The Transformers*
- *Double Take*
- *Flashpoint*
- *Madballs*
- *Quondam*
- *Roland's Rat Race*

RED RAT SOFTWARE
Pushover
With great cartoon visuals and addictive gameplay, *Pushover* became a popular puzzle

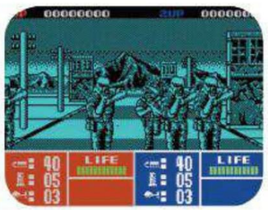


Other Sensible Software games
- *Wizkid*

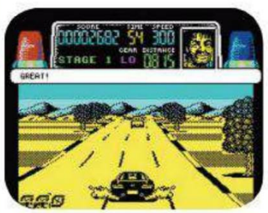
Arcade developers

TAITO
Rainbow Islands
Graftgold's stunning conversion of Taito's arcade hit was quite simply magnificent, capturing virtually every detail of the arcade original. Best of all, every conversion was absolutely superb.

Operation Thunderbolt
As good as *Operation Wolf* was, Ocean's port of the sequel was far better. Great graphics, smooth scrolling and an all-important two-player mode sealed the deal.



Chase HQ
Another cracking port, with extremely accurate versions on practically every home system. Just don't mention the awful C64 version.



Other Taito conversions
- *Chase HQ II: Special Criminal Investigation*
- *Liquid Kids*
- *The New Zealand Story*
- *Operation Wolf*
- *Parasol Stars*
- *Plotting*
- *Puzznic*
- *Space Gun*

KONAMI
Gryzor/Contra
While the C64 version was a little ropey, the Spectrum and Amstrad versions of Konami's hit were of a high standard.



Combat School
It may have been liable to break your joystick, but it's amazing how well the home versions of *Combat School* captured the arcade original.



Other Konami conversions
- *Track & Field*

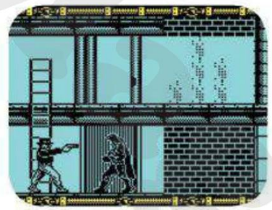
NINTENDO
Donkey Kong
Ocean delivered decent Spectrum and C64 ports and an almost flawless CPC version of this classic.



Other Nintendo conversions
- *Mario Bros*

Film studios

WARNER BROS
Batman: The Movie
A slick adaptation of the hit movie, thanks to Ocean's formula of turning key points of the film into mini-games. The racing sections in the 16-bit games looked amazing.



Other Warner Bros licences
- *Cobra*
- *Dennis*
- *Lethal Weapon*
- *The NeverEnding Story*
- *V*

ORION PICTURES
RoboCop
Possibly the best film licence that Ocean ever produced.



Great visuals, clever mini-games and fast-paced action saw *RoboCop* receiving rave reviews across all formats.

Other Orion licences
- *Platoon*
- *RoboCop 2*
- *RoboCop 3*
- *Navy SEALs*

UNIVERSAL
Jurassic Park
Ocean was unable to secure the rights for Sega consoles, but it still managed to deliver an excellent adaptation that blended 2D exploration with impressive 3D sections.



Other Universal licences
- *Darkman*

PARAMOUNT
The Untouchables
It featured the same structure found in other big Ocean licences, but it worked a treat. A solid adaptation with some excellent level design.



Other Paramount licences
- *The Addams Family*
- *Cool World*
- *Top Gun*

CAROLCO
Rambo: First Blood Part II
Even as a simple *Commando* clone, Ocean's first *Rambo* game was a good one. Great controls, a stunning soundtrack and an insane kill count perfectly captured the OTT spirit of the film.



Other Carolco licences
- *Rambo: First Blood Part II*
- *Red Heat*
- *Terminator 2*
- *Total Recall*

Catcha Snatcha

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

» RETROREVIVAL

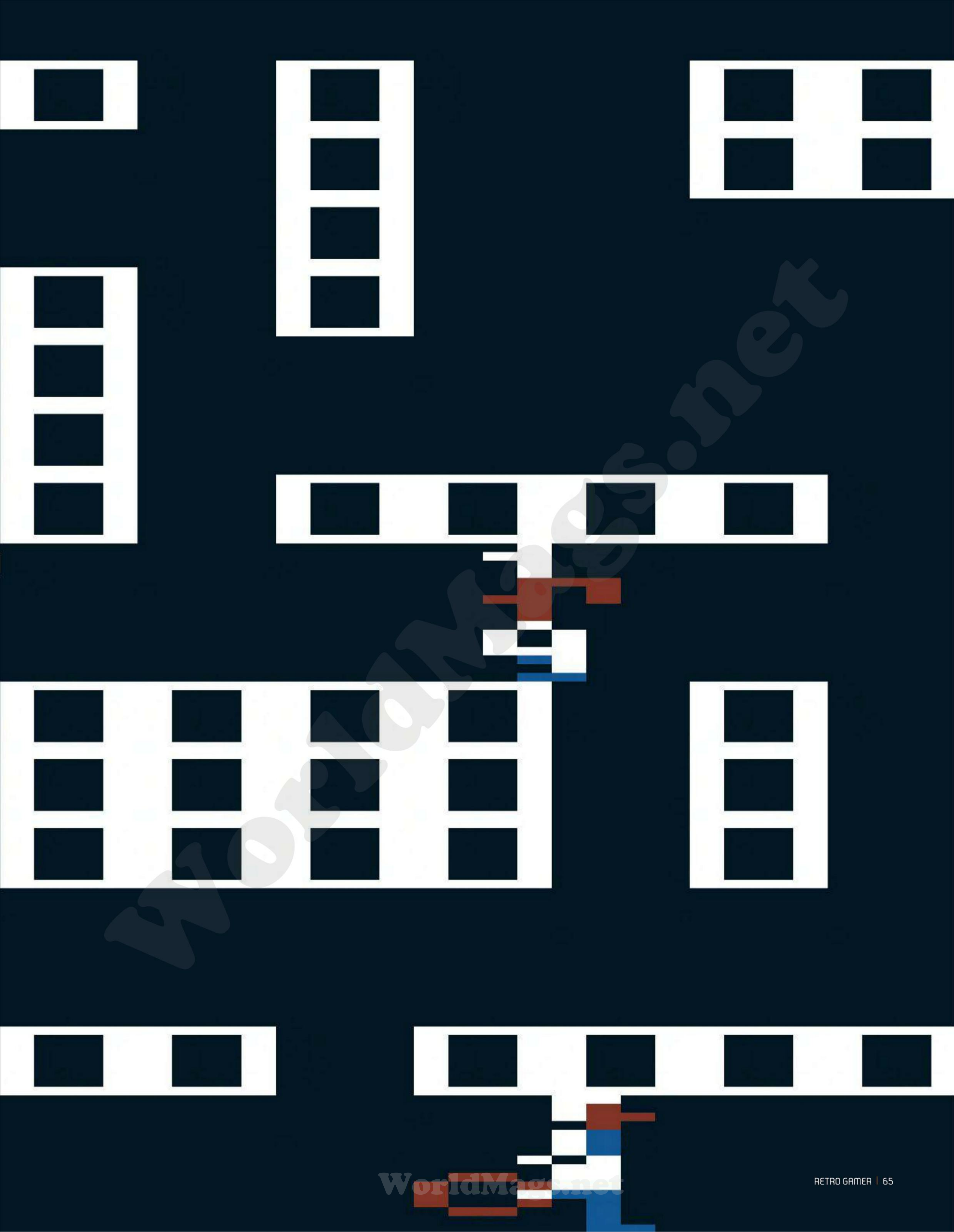


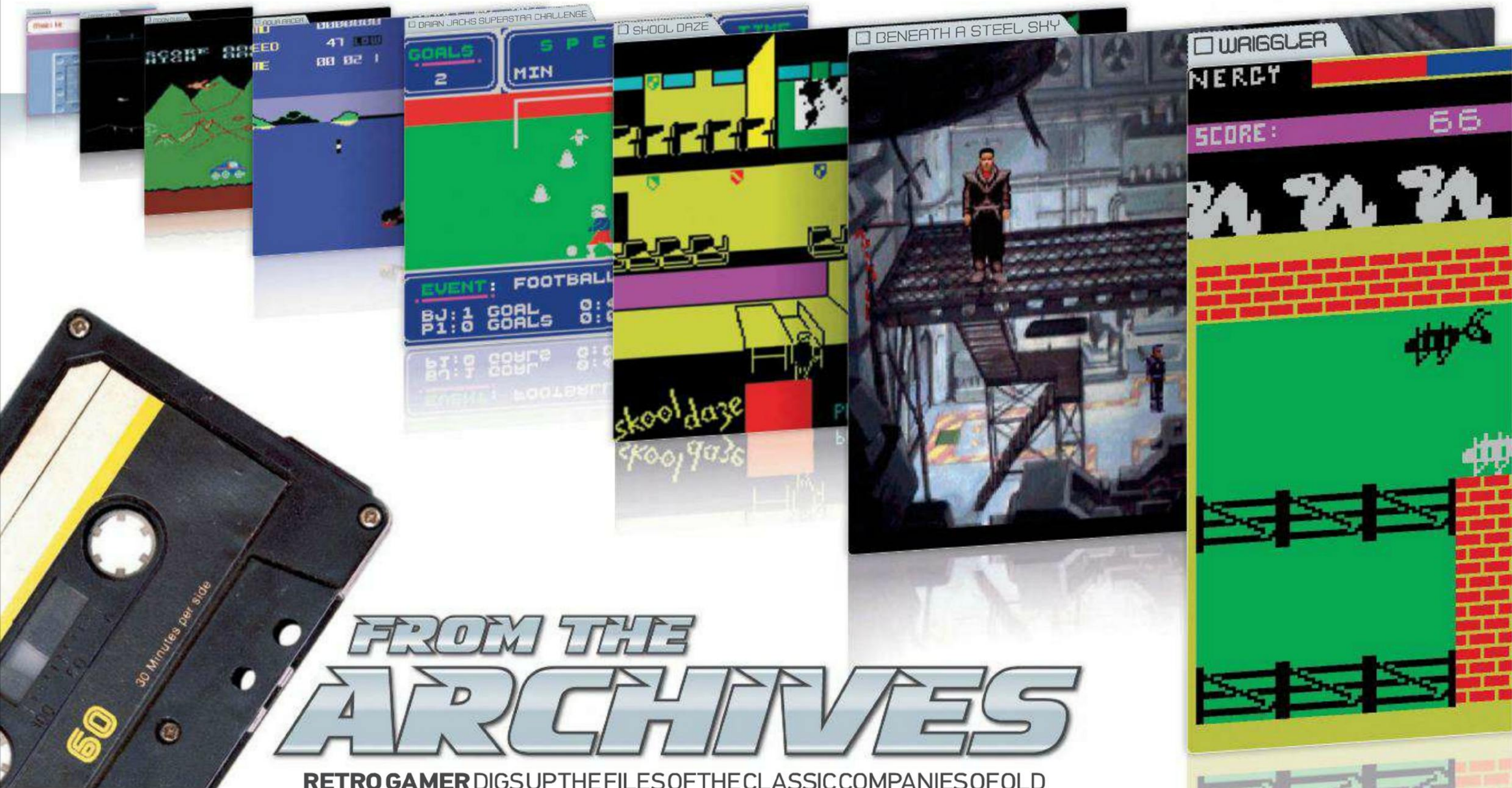
» VIC 20
» IMAGINE
» 1983

Before he became famous for being too young to drive his own car, having a toilet-filled lair in *Manic Miner* and not writing megagame *Psyclapse,* Eugene Evans produced a pair of quirky titles for the unexpanded Vic 20. Wacky Waiters is probably the best known, a kind of *Frogger* meets *Fawlty Towers* affair, involving a harassed, accident-prone waiter trying to ferry food from kitchen to table via a series of fast-moving lifts. It was a tough job, resulting in frequent headlong falls down elevator shafts and sudden sackings. And all for well below minimum wage.

Eugene's follow up, *Catcha Snatcha*, puts another unlikely profession in the gaming spotlight by focusing its maze-based gameplay on the glamorous world of the store detective. Much of your working day is spent returning lost property (and occasionally lost children) to the relevant offices, while keeping an eye out for shoplifters who shove stolen goods up their jumpers and mingle innocently with other shoppers until you give them a summary frisking. Some customers respond to this infringement of their personal space especially badly and take to leaving parcel bombs among the aisles, which seems to be something of an over-reaction.

It's worth the slog to make it to the end of a shift to witness the strange change that happens after 6pm. The clientele go from casual browsers to frenzied bargain-seekers, sprinting from shelf to checkout at quadruple speed and making your already arduous tasks virtually impossible. It's funny and frustrating, which is probably a fair summation of both Eugene's games for Imagine Software. However, they retain a special place in my heart, not only for being Vic exclusives, but for reminding me of the days when the most mundane of occupations could become the inspiration for a videogame. Look out for a future piece celebrating these working class game heroes. *





FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

BEAU JOLLY

Graeme Mason welcomes you to the Beau Jolly story; a story of how two men from the record industry revolutionised the way videogames were distributed, and in the process created one of the most successful software companies of the Eighties.

This From the Archives will be quite different from any you have read before in that it focuses on a company that created not a single videogame themselves. Borne from a business model honed and proven in the buoyant record industry, the men behind Beau Jolly had one simple idea: to licence third-party video games and re-package them into value-for-money game compilations.

But we start our story in the late Sixties, with a salesman from Winnipeg named Philip Kives. Raised on a farm and a big fan of country music, Kives wanted to create a country music compilation album. This turned out to be a great idea, as *25 Great Country Hits* became an instant hit for his K-Tel Records. Having already recognised the powerful appeal of television, K-Tel secured massive TV advertising, thus ensuring an unprecedented level of awareness of their products.

Eventually the label expanded into the UK market and around this time, selling Maxpax coffee vending machines for General Foods was Colin Ashby. His success in marketing led to an invitation to join K-Tel. "I joined them in 1977, just before the summer - historically a slow period for TV advertised products," begins Colin. "However, that autumn we went to the trade with a strong line-up of records, the orders flooded in and I was soon hooked on the music business!" Already working within the industry was Nigel Mason, and he would presently be recruited by K-Tel in light of their impressive turnaround during the winter of 1977.

Going it Alone

Nigel's role at K-Tel was as A&R Manager. "I picked the tracks and then licenced them from all the different record companies," Nigel explains, "which would then be compiled onto one of K-Tel's compilations." With Colin Ashby soon promoted to MD, K-Tel went from strength to strength with records such as *Chart Hits* and *The Love Album* dominating the charts. Eventually, in 1982, the pair decided it was time to begin their own business together with a label named TV Records, backed by Virgin Records bosses Richard Branson and Simon Draper. Unfortunately the new venture didn't last long, under pressure from the rising cost of TV advertising in an increasingly competitive field. When Branson eventually withdrew his financial support to start his airline it forced Colin and Nigel to abandon TV Records, despite some moderate successes. "We didn't give up though," says Nigel. "[We] simply created a new label and began again, this time recording and creating our own records, rather than licensing in other music."

In November 1982, the ex-K-Tel employees puzzled over a name for their new company, an annual event proved to be an excellent source of inspiration. Colin explains: "In November, the Beaujolais Nouveau wine arrived from France. We took the latter part for the record company name and then thought we might as well use the first part as well." Thus "Beau Jolly" was born, although it remained just a name as Colin and Nigel concentrated chiefly on their music business. Yet despite Nouveau Records prospering, thanks to the success of a panpipe album entitled

INSTANT EXPERT

The name "Beau Jolly" was inspired by the November 1982 Beaujolais Nouveau wine. The second part became the name of a sister record company.

Beau Jolly began in 1983 with four ex-music business people: Nigel Mason, Colin Ashby, Eddie Hooper and Alan Davidson.

Their first office was in Ealing Broadway, close to the premises of Nigel and Colin's earlier employer, K-Tel.

Initially they handled the distribution of Imagine's back catalogue before very successfully moving into the compilation market.

10 Computer Hits, first released in 1985, was their most successful line, with an original release price of £9.95 and containing a wide variety of genres.

K-Tel themselves entered the software market after Colin and Nigel left but with little success. They withdrew in 1985.



> **"We could see computer games were becoming very big business"**

COLIN ASHBY ON THE SWITCH FROM RECORDS TO VIDEOGAMES



Flights of Fancy, they would soon see the increasing popularity of computer games as a possibly useful business venture for their dormant company. Colin and Nigel were quick to get involved. "In 1983, we could see that computer games, specifically on the ZX Spectrum and Commodore, were becoming big business," recalls Colin. "So through our contacts we decided to investigate if we could licence games that had already been successful with a plan to create compilations." Strangely, however, Beau Jolly's initial venture into software distribution was with single games.

Imagine a Deal

"Our first move was to contact what we perceived to be the most successful and well-known games company at the time," says Colin, speaking of Liverpool-based Imagine Software. "I initially met Mark Butler in London, and he was agreeable to our proposal [of licensing Imagine's games]." In fact, with an interest from Imagine for Beau Jolly to licence practically their entire back catalogue, it became clear to Colin that single game releases could also be profitable in the short-term. History tells us that Imagine had a very good reason for wishing to profit so much and so quickly from their older games, yet Colin Ashby had no idea of this as he and fellow negotiator Eddie Hooper were duly invited to Imagine's offices in Liverpool. The industry newcomers were impressed with the set-up of the famous software house: "The only thing that surprised me was the lack of staff," mentions Colin, "but we were informed that many of the programmers worked at night." Imagine's Ian Hetherington proudly demonstrated to Colin and Eddie the projects they were working on, including the ill-fated Mega Games. "We thought that by doing a deal with them it would create a working relationship for the future," explains Colin, "and the agreement was to buy the rights for the games they had and all the existing stock of those titles." For a short while the arrangement proved satisfactory as Beau Jolly distributed many of Imagine's existing titles while the developer continued to work on its Mega Games. As a result, when it eventually came to light early in 1984 that Imagine were in financial trouble, Beau Jolly, like many others, were taken by surprise. "It appeared our payment had given them temporary respite but eventually they just couldn't avoid the inevitable," remarks Colin sadly. Undeterred, Beau Jolly set about realising their original vision of creating compilations of games, aided by their new distribution contacts and links from the record business.

In 1984, the first Imagine compilation hit the streets. The *Value Pack* boasted a price tag of £14.99 and contained four of Imagine's 16K Spectrum games: *Jumping Jack, Arcadia, Ah Diddums* and *Molar Maul*. Closely following up was another pack for ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

7 The number of games that were featured on *Five Star Games 3*.

20 *Giant Games*, a compilation for the PC – Beau Jolly's final official release.

25 *Great Country Hits*, where it all started for K-Tel Records.

66 was the average percentage score of the games on *10 Computer Hits 5* that were reviewed in *Crash Magazine* with no Crash Smashes (the highest mark was given by *Dark Sceptre* with a score of 88 per cent).

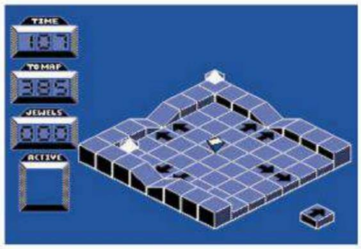
86 average percentage score of the games on the original *10 Computer Hits* that were reviewed in *Crash Magazine* including four Crash Smashes.

250,000 Pounds reportedly spent by Beau Jolly on TV advertising for the Imagine Value packs.

500,000 was the approximate number of cassettes inherited by Beau Jolly in the aftermath of the Imagine deal. They were stored in two portakabins.







» [Spectrum] The criminally underrated *Deactivators* exploded to life on *10 Computer Hits 4*.

TIMELINE

1977 COLIN ASHBY ACCEPTS AN OFFER TO JOIN THE UK DIVISION OF K-TEL RECORDS. NIGEL MASON JOINS THE FOLLOWING YEAR.

1982 BEAU JOLLY IS FORMED ALONG WITH NOUVEAU RECORDS BY NIGEL MASON, COLIN ASHBY, EDDIE HOOPER AND ALAN DAVIDSON.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Nigel Mason
Nigel continued in the world of compilations for a while thanks to his relationship with Virgin Games, before moving back into the music business with Colin Ashby. He also owned the infamous R-Bar in his hometown of Esher, a regular haunt of John Terry and the Chelsea football team. Today Nigel manages a property portfolio.

Colin Ashby
After leaving Beau Jolly in the early Nineties, Colin began his own budget record label before selling it on a few years later. He subsequently retired and today lives in France where he also manages property in addition to breeding horses.

Rod Cousens
Rod has enjoyed a long and successful career in videogames. After starting at Quicksilva back in 1981, he subsequently created Electric Dreams in 1985 before holding several high-profile positions at companies such as Activision and Acclaim. In 2005 he was appointed CEO of Codemasters and in 2007 received a CBE in honour of Services to the Computer Game Industry.



Andy Payne
One of the men behind The Producers, the company responsible for many of Beau Jolly's iconic boxes, Andy has also enjoyed an impressive career in gaming, most recently at the helm of famous budget label Mastertronic. He was awarded an OBE for services to the UK computer games industry in the New Year's Honours List.

the Spectrum 48k, Commodore and Vic-20 that included six games for £19.99 in a period where budget software was still rare and most games retailed for between £6 and £10. "It was a crazy time," recalls Nigel Mason. "[Imagine] were going under and what we did in the end was essentially buy all their stock up, what must have been half a million cassettes." Ultimately these cassettes had to be shipped down from Liverpool to Pye Records in London who were at the time acting as distributor for Nouveau. "Pye rented out two portakabins," continues Nigel, "and we simply filled up these two units with half a million cassettes!" Much of Colin, Nigel and Eddie Hooper's time in these early days was taken up at their rented warehouse, repackaging the Imagine games into their new compilation cases. "We were literally putting the early packs together ourselves, probably five hundred a day, talk about a cottage industry!" says Nigel amusedly.

The Way Ahead

The two Imagine compilations were good sellers, with no little thanks to Beau Jolly's (reportedly) £250,000 television campaign. But despite this success, Nigel and Colin had already concluded that they would not develop their own software. "We decided not to take that risk because we already knew we had a formula that worked," says Colin. "I was a record salesman. Nigel was a record producer. So we simply applied the K-Tel marketing process to the software market with our roles adapted accordingly." And Nigel confirms, "It was incredible, because we didn't really have a clue about games. We just thought you can spend thousands having some guy program a game and there's always a risk that it would never even see the light of day. So why take that risk?" With the Imagine name bought up by Ocean Software, Beau Jolly essentially gained all of the remaining stock, ceding rights to re-press Imagine's games to the Manchester company. "They could have done a new compilation and put it out," says Nigel. "But it would have cost a lot of money and we were already up and running, not to mention streets ahead in terms of boxes and artwork." Ultimately, Ocean had other plans for the Imagine label, as the first of many successful sports titles and arcade conversions appeared in 1985.

The *Value Packs* had paved the way for Beau Jolly's future success, yet the fallout from the Imagine deal meant their subsequent methods were to move more in line with Colin and Nigel's previous work at K-Tel. From now on they would deal with several different companies within the same project rather than rely on one sole software house. "We determined that from then on we would approach it the same way as a record compilation," agrees Nigel, "whereby we would go for the biggest games that we could get in terms of sales, popularity and chart position and work our way down from there." In these early days, with the idea of re-licensing games and compilations a new one, Nigel spent a considerable amount of time explaining Beau Jolly's concept to the different software houses. "I'd clarify what the compilation was all about and how we'd pay them a royalty, essentially giving them secondary money for a game that they



1983 COLIN ASHBY CONCLUDES A DEAL WITH IMAGINE SOFTWARE TO DISTRIBUTE THEIR BACK CATALOGUE. ALAN DAVIDSON LEAVES THE COMPANY, FOLLOWED BY EDDIE HOOPER A YEAR LATER.

1984 THE FIRST TWO COMPILATIONS APPEAR: VALUE PACK 16K AND VALUE PACK 48K FOR A RANGE OF FORMATS INCLUDING THE SPECTRUM, DRAGON 32, BBC ELECTRON AND COMMODORE 64.

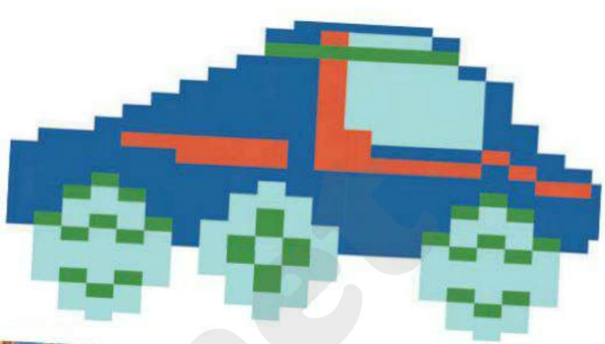
1985 *10 COMPUTER HITS* DEBUTS ON SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64 AND AMSTRAD.

1987 BEAU JOLLY'S BUSIEST YEAR BY FAR WITH SEVEN COMPILATIONS RELEASED ON THE SPECTRUM ALONE.

1989 THE FALTERING 8-BIT MARKET MEANT THAT BEAU JOLLY BEGAN TO RELEASE GENRE-FOCUSED COMPILATIONS SUCH AS THE *TOLKIEN TRILOGY* AND *SOCCER SPECTACULAR*.

1990 BEAU JOLLY RELEASE THEIR FIRST 16-BIT COMPILATION, *MIND GAMES*, ON COMMODORE AMIGA AND ATARI ST.

1997 BEAU JOLLY RELEASES ITS FINAL COMPILATION, *20 GIANT GAMES*, ON PC.



could then put towards the development of new product." The key difference to the music industry was the timing, as Nigel explains. "In the record business it was much more instant so you'd look at records from the last four to six weeks; but with games we were looking basically for any title from the previous year that had been a hit, although of course we tried initially to get the most recent games." The multiples (chains of shops such as WHSmiths) were even more receptive to the idea once Beau Jolly had explained to them that their compilations wouldn't take sales away from current software as the titles included would either be on a downward sales curve or no longer stocked by the stores. Colin and Nigel's experience and faith in the compilation model from the record industry helped them to persuade the chains that Beau Jolly products would be huge sellers.

Blaze of Publicity

The next year (1985) saw Beau Jolly finally release a K-Tel record-style compilation with the first in the popular and long-running 10 Computer Hits series. In a blaze of publicity, they had managed to secure some genuine classics, especially on the Spectrum version, with *Chuckie Egg*, *Skool Daze*, *Project Future* and *Wriggler* all coming with a fine critical pedigree along with the all-important impressive sales figures. The compilation also offered a considerable breadth of genres. "With compilations, especially with games, rather than music," says Nigel, "we tried to give people as much choice as possible. We calculated that if five out of the ten games appealed to a potential customer then that would be all it needed for them to buy the compilation." To this end, Beau Jolly ensured, at least initially, that their collections contained several genres in order to appeal to the widest market. "We looked at magazines scores and aimed for the games that scored eight or nine out of ten. Then I broke it down into genres so we'd have one sports game, an adventure game and so on." says Nigel. With so many candidates, however, testing all the games themselves proved troublesome. "There simply wasn't the time," says Nigel, "although we'd try to play-test as many games as possible to make sure they were suitable and that we had the maximum product knowledge. Sometimes, though, we just had to rely on reviews and statistics."

The process of acquiring games was simple. Beau Jolly would approach a publisher and offer them a royalty for the desired game. The details of the governing contract would vary, but generally Nigel would try and obtain exclusivity for a period of six months, during which the software publisher guaranteed they would not press fresh copies of the game and that the game's trade price would not be reduced. Despite the potential complexities, most titles were licenced with little fuss according to Nigel. "I wasn't in the conflict business. We were in a secondary market, so people just took us for what we were doing – extending the life of their games."

With another Spectrum & C64 compilation on the market (the action-orientated *Mega Hits*), Beau Jolly began to ▶



> **"We tried to give people as much choice as possible"**
>
> NIGEL MASON ON THE VARIETY OF GENRES WITHIN EACH COMPILATION

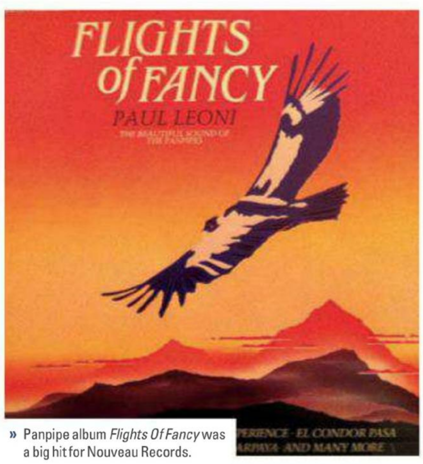
DINNER TIME



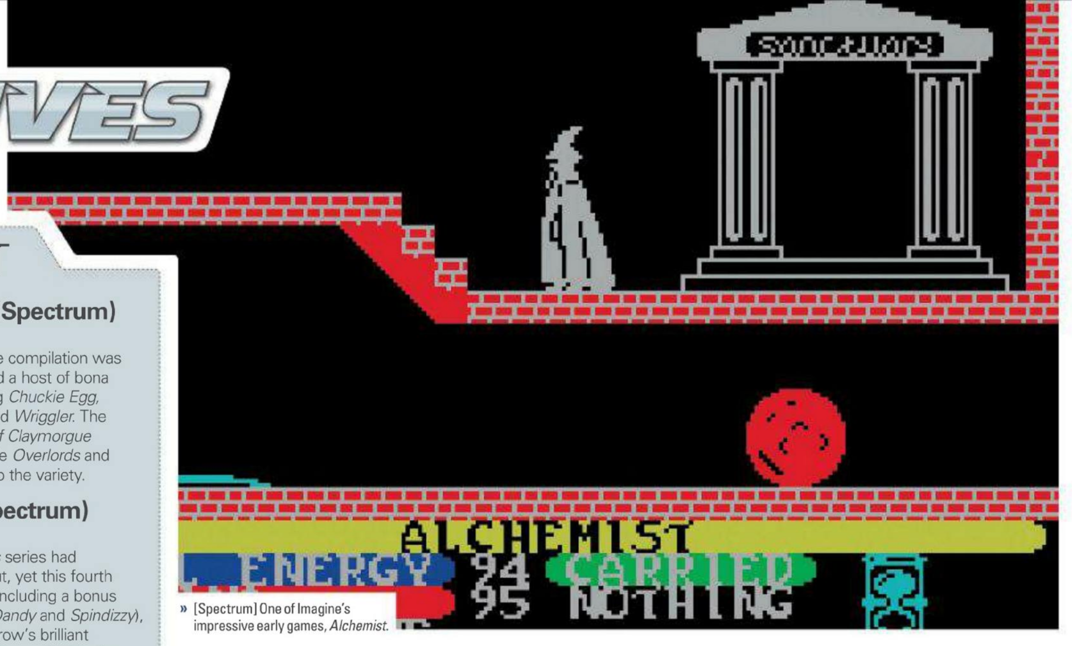
Industry veteran Rod Cousens met Nigel Mason whilst working at Quicksilva and they soon struck up a friendship that has lasted to this day via Electric Dreams and Activision, amongst others. "Nigel was a canny operator," grins Rod, "and every deal was always a negotiation! I viewed it as standard practice, however, and it made sense to consider third party IP exploitation – with an incentive of course." Rod was in charge of organising the "In-Dins", a series of dinners designed to celebrate the biggest and best games of each year. He soon recruited Nigel Mason into his entertainment team thanks to Nigel's musical background. "He was our singer-songwriter, and would write the lyrics and music before performing lead vocals. He actually has a very good singing voice!"



» [C64] Micromega's *Jinn Genie* from the original *Computer Hits*.



» Panpipe album *Flights Of Fancy* was a big hit for Nouveau Records.



» [Spectrum] One of Imagine's impressive early games, *Alchemist*.

SIX OF THE BEST



10 Computer Hits (Spectrum) [1985]

Beau Jolly's first non-Imagine compilation was released in 1985 and featured a host of bona fide Speccy classics including *Chuckie Egg, Skool Daze, Harrier Attack* and *Wriggler*. The graphic adventure *Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle*, obligatory strategy title *Overlords* and Micromega's *Jasper* added to the variety.



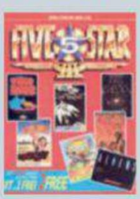
10 Computer Hits 4 (Spectrum) [1987]

The quality of the *10 Computer Hits* series had diminished noticeably since its debut, yet this fourth entry instantly became a favourite. Including a bonus two free games (Electric Dreams' *Dandy* and *Spindizzy*), *Computer Hits 4* contained Steve Crow's brilliant *Starquake*, the underrated *Deactivators* and intriguing gumshoe adventure game *Contact Sam Cruise*.



10 Computer Hits 4 (Acorn Electron/BBC) [1988]

The Acorn and BBC version of *CH4* boasted a remarkably solid line up. Leading the way were *Deathstar* (an enjoyable *Sinistar* clone), the perennially popular *Repton*, *Zalaga* (another arcade clone) and the classic *Thrust*, with slick shooter *Psycastria*, Alligata's *Blagger* and *Galaforce* also well worth playing. Only beat-em-up *Karate Combat* let the side down.



Five Star Games 3 (C64/Spectrum) [1987]

Like Computer Hits 4, Five Star Games 3 had "free games" meaning you got seven games for your money. The original five were great: Don Priestley's colourful cartoon adaptation *The Trap Door*, Hewson's *Uridium* and *Firelord*, CRL's brilliant space adventure *Tau Ceti* and classic BEU *Way of the Exploding Fist*. The extra games were *Strike Force Harrier* and *Aliens*.



Supreme Challenge: The Ultimate Test (C64/Spectrum) [1988]

Released in 1988 on the C64, Amstrad and ZX Spectrum, this fantastic collection of games represented absurdly good value for money. Rainbird's *Starglider*, Cascade's *ACE 2* and the addictive puzzler *Tetris* were good enough; throw in *Firebird*'s influential *Elite* strategy game, *The Sentinel* and you had months of gaming fun.



Power, Corruption & Lies (PC) [1995]

Released in 1995, this compilation included only four games, but what a quartet they were. Legendary dystopian point-and-clicker *Beneath a Steel Sky* led the way, closely followed by Julian Gollop's fantastically involving strategy game *UFO: Enemy Unknown* and the groundbreaking RTS, *Dune II: Battle for Arrakis*, and Microprose's F-14 Tomcat title *Fleet Defender*.

TWO TO AVOID



10 Computer Hits 3 [1987]

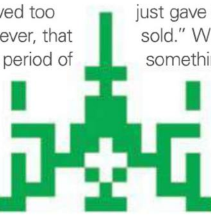
The *Computer Hits* series reached its nadir with this third outing. There were no real standout games and although *Who Dares Wins 2, Cauldron* and *Forbidden Planet* were competent enough, the remainder were either ancient (*3D Lunattack*) or simply poor (*Give my Regards to Broad Street* and *Showjumping*).



20 Chart Busters [1988]

Boasting a seemingly good-value twenty titles for £9.99, the presence of budget clunkers such as *LA Swat, Formula 1 Simulator, War Cars* and *Ninja Master* did it no favours and the decent games, such as *Tau Ceti* and *Way of the Exploding Fist* were aging and freely available as budget re-releases. *Brian Jacks Superstar Challenge* also returned.

expand, releasing ancillary collections such as *5 Computer Hits* as well as continuing the *10 Computer Hits* series across a range of computers. Did they try and get the same games across every format, we ask? "Yes, initially we tried very hard to, just so we wouldn't need to change the covers too much," says Nigel. "In the end, however, we gave up as it proved too troublesome." It was key, however, that with the short (and expensive) period of TV advertising on offer, that at least three formats were released at a time.



"TV advertising back then was God," smiles Nigel. "It was a much more captured market with essentially only one commercial channel, and the TV advertisement sold the compilation to the multiples. We told them when the adverts were booked for and they placed their order based on that." Eventually the TV advertising became too expensive for a relatively small operation such as Beau Jolly, but by that time it had served its purpose of getting them into the marketplace and establishing their reputation. Nevertheless, it had been a risky tactic during the first few months of the company. "We were taking all the money we made from sales and ploughing it back into advertising," says Nigel solemnly. "And although it was a lot of money we did have a get-out; we would book a three-week campaign which could be pulled after a week – so we would phone up a selected number of our network of stores and work out if the projected sales justified the extra two weeks. If the compilation wasn't selling, then we'd pull the advertising, hope the compilation would sell out, and that the returns wouldn't be too major."

Compilations Catch on

Beau Jolly continued to release successful compilations over the next three years; in 1986 there was *10 Computer Hits 2* whilst the following year saw the debut of *Five Star Games, Computer Classics* and two more editions of *10 Computer Hits*, now cunningly accompanied by a further two free games. It was a hugely rewarding and enjoyable time for Nigel. "We got to make some really good relationships with many of the software houses such as Electric Dreams, Activision, Hewson and Firebird. We regularly had a stand in the PCW show at Earl's Court and one year bought up ten thousand watches or something daft and just gave them away with every compilation sold." With game compilations still something of a rarity, Nigel had a decent market from which to select his titles, although unfortunately for Beau Jolly, this was starting to change extremely rapidly. "I guess it was always healthy to have competition, but it began to make it very difficult to licence the right games, and we started to often get much more inferior product being offered to us."

By 1987, the 8-bit games market had become flooded with budget games. New 16-bit technology was arriving and dedicated cartridge-based games systems were fast becoming fashionable. Unfortunately for Beau Jolly, every major software publisher was now releasing their own compilations, stuffed full of the best of their own titles. "I don't blame them for doing that," reflects Nigel generously, "and although it was a concern that the compilations we were putting out weren't as good, we knew we still had a market and people still bought them." In addition to this, Beau Jolly's earlier compilations had demonstrated the number of independent software houses in existence in the early to mid Eighties; by 1987 most of these companies had either folded or been bought out by bigger fish, leaving the number of players much reduced.

Thinking Thematically

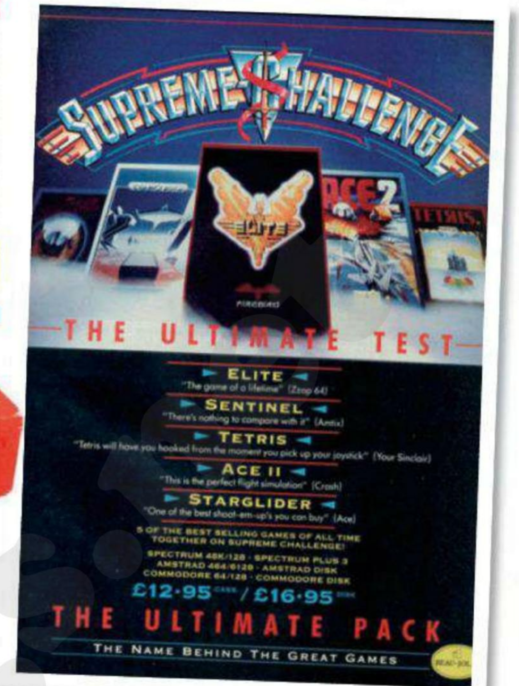
Undeterred, Beau Jolly ploughed on, albeit with a notable change to their original edict. "We started to put together more compilations held together by a theme," explains Nigel, "because it was becoming obvious that we couldn't do collections such as *Computer Hits* anymore as the games we could get for them were simply







» [Commodore 64] Beau Jolly finally went for broke in 1991 with massive sets of 30 games, such as this, *Big Box 2* (Photo courtesy of The Attic Bug).



too old. The market forced us to specialise." As a result, the latter years of the decade saw Beau Jolly release collections such as *Soccer Spectacular*, a compilation of football games released just before the 1990 World Cup and *The Tolkien Trilogy*, both of which sold very well according to Nigel. With *10 Computer Hits* retired, Beau Jolly also began to pile more and more games into its boxes with compilations such as *20 Chart Busters* and *30 Red Hot Hits* that often included older games re-licenced by Nigel, having appeared on earlier compilations. "We didn't even bother re-acquiring the exclusivity on most occasions," says Nigel, "as I concluded they could do what they wanted with their games. Even selling them for 99p, we'd still be better value with the number of games on the compilation. Most of the time we still had the cassettes made up with the games on so it was just a point of re-labelling them. It was just about pure value for money."

The new decade brought even more problems. "Games were beginning to get bigger in content, and as a result more expensive to licence," remarks Nigel. "It was also noticeably harder to acquire titles during this period as the relatively newer platforms and companies were more possessive of their product." This, coupled with the advent of the PlayStation and the need for a licence in order to publish games for this system, meant things would never be the same again for Beau Jolly, forcing them to focus on just one or two formats. Nevertheless, the higher price that single games had begun to demand at this point, with it not uncommon for PC titles to retail at a minimum of £19.99, worked to Beau Jolly's advantage as their range of 4-game DOS and 16-bit compilations sold for a money-saving twenty-five pounds. This coupled with their slim operating costs meant the company actually made more profit per compilation during this period.



King of the World

Beau Jolly's final official compilation was 1997's *20 Giant Games* for the PC. Priced at a penny shy of thirty pounds, it fittingly encapsulated the original premise inherited from the record industry twelve years earlier. A wide breadth of genres were included, such as strategy, sports, role-playing and arcade games.

> **"Games were getting bigger and more expensive"**
> NIGEL MASON ON THE MOVE TO 16-BIT AND PC COMPILATIONS

Despite the end of Beau Jolly, Nigel lent his expertise to Virgin Games with a series of compilations. "It worked well for a time, but my intention at this point was definitely to get back into music," says Nigel, and in conjunction with his old colleague Colin Ashby, they made a spectacular return to the music business with a successful follow up to their panpipe album of a few years earlier. "We had some friends at Universal," recalls Nigel, "and we covered a couple of tracks that were very successful at the time – the Celine Dion song from *Titanic* and Bryan Adams' 'Everything I Do'. Universal liked it and within a couple of months the album was at number 2 in the UK charts and a top ten hit all over Europe."

Yet despite his deep love of music, Nigel recalls the games enterprise with a clear fondness. "It was a fantastic time to be involved in the industry," he confirms, "and we got to make lots of very good relationships within it. And the great thing was we actually owned the company so we had a lot of pride in putting together each compilation and we always wanted to make sure we gave the best value possible. That was what it was about, simple as that."

Our special thanks to Nigel Mason, Colin Ashby, Rod Cousens and Andy Payne.

PRODUCING THE GOODS



In 1988, Andy Payne helped set up a game production company called The Producers and their first customer was Beau Jolly. "Nigel [Mason] had heard we were the new kids on the block," divulges Andy, "and so asked us to make the boxes for his latest compilation." At the time game boxes were changing from the common crystal double cassette archetype to bigger and glossier cardboard boxes. "We had gained vital technical knowledge on how to make the new two-piece A5 cardboard boxes," continues Andy, "and make them cheaply by doing deals with box-makers in Leicester who had seen their trade in shoeboxes recede thanks to imports of shoes from Europe." Beau Jolly would supply the cassettes before The Producers assembled the box (including a cardboard "riser" to hold the cassettes or discs) and finally shrink-wrapped each unit. "Nigel was a pleasure to deal with, and always cut a fair deal," concludes Andy. "It was fun, but in those days we "did and learned" – and no-one really knew what they were doing!"



» [Spectrum] Microsphere's classic bike game *Wheelie* featured on Mega Hits (1985).



» [Amiga] The strategy-themed compilation *Mind Games* featured the intense *Conflict Europe*.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» Roger and Wolf are pretty agile. Not only can they perform a double-jump but they'll also automatically grab onto ledges. Roger is quicker, but Wolf can leap higher.

» Throughout the game Wolf and Roger encounter a variety of characters, who offer assistance by accompanying them through the stage.

» Whenever you acquire a new weapon this meter at the bottom of the screen gets replenished. Roger and Wolf will then begin drawing special attacks from it.

DYNA GEAR

■ **Developer:** Scarab / Sammy ■ **Year:** 1993 ■ **Genre:** Run and gun

■ **Containing traces of *Ghouls'n Ghosts, Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja* and *Magic Sword, Dyna Gear* is a jaunty and fast-paced run and gun game that tells the story of a flaxen haired Buck Rogers type (named Roger) who gets warped million of years to the past and crashes his ship on a strange jungle planet that is populated by dinosaurs and amiable werewolves.**

After dusting himself down and assessing the damage to his ship, Roger is greeted by a friendly bipedal wolf (named Wolf). He explains that Roger's arch nemesis, Gustaf, has been turning the planet's populace of genial dinosaurs into deadly combatants, igniting something of a civil war between the dino and wolf communities. Realising they share a common enemy, the pair subsequently form an alliance and work together to put an end to Gustaf's dinosaur-abusing ways.

At the start of the game you are given the choice of controlling either Roger or Wolf, although the only discernible difference is the fact that Roger is quicker on his feet while Wolf has a slightly springier jump.

Stretched over eight colourful and distinct stages, *Dyna Gear*'s gameplay sees you running and blasting a path through hordes of prehistoric enemies using a mix of antiquated weaponry, including arrows, broadswords, morning stars and axes. Some stages feature branching routes, and dip into loose platformer territory, but all are teeming with enemies and bosses to fight; from deadly flora and large dinosaurs, to fire-spewing Incan statues.

One aspect that makes *Dyna Gear* unique from most other games of its genre is that along the way our heroes meet up with various sub-characters who will offer their assistance by helping them cut through the enemy masses. So if you've ever wondered what it might look like to see a werewolf and a Thor-lookalike fight aside a red stegosaurus, we're pretty sure this is the only game in history that will give you that.

If you've never heard of *Dyna Gear* before, or, to give its full unabridged title, *Dyna Gear - An Action Adventure On The Era Of The Dinosaur,* then be sure to check it out. You won't regret it.



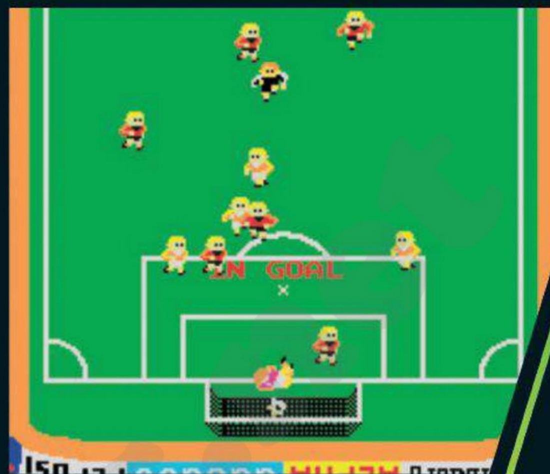
CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

JOE & MAC: CAVEMAN NINJA 1991

Looking for a run and gun game with a prehistoric theme? *Joe & Mac* fits that bill nicely. Starring two cavemen who are actually about as Shinobi-like as a purple hippo, the game has colourful visuals, goofy humour and a variety of weapons.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

EXCITING SOCCER



■ **Developer:** Alpha Denshi ■ **Year:** 1983 ■ **Genre:** Sports

■ **This month we** came to the unlikely view that maybe, just maybe, an unconverted Japanese football game calling itself *Exciting Soccer* could turn out to more thrilling than the one that calls itself *Sensible Soccer*, and thus we would unearth one of the greatest undiscovered footy games in history. Our findings: we're clearly idiots. *Exciting Soccer* isn't a patch on *Sensible*. In fact, it's not a patch on watching two pensioners squabble over a stamp. The players animate like they've already just played 90 minutes of football, tackling seems to happen at random, and passing and scoring feels just as erratic. Its only saving grace is the sound, and this is thanks to a combination of digitized speech and the game's music being a not that terrible rendition of The Champ's classic *Tequila*, which is what you'll be craving after a swift half of this.

NOVA 2001

■ **Developer:** UPL ■ **Year:** 1984 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] While *Nova 2001* does nothing particularly groundbreaking in the genre, we found part of its charm was is its accessibility.

■ ***Nova 2001* isn't** a terribly accurate depiction of outer space back in the year 2001. It finds you in command of a space ship that is under constant attack from *Robotron: 2084*-looking robots and alien spaceships.

In this free-roaming shooter your aim is to simply clear the screen of all enemies as quickly as possible. The faster you do this, the more points you stand to earn, while bonus points can also be collected by picking up tokens dropped by vanquished enemies.

Adding just a little more tension to the action, players must also keep an eye out for a second enemy ship that will randomly flash up on screen and attempt to make its way from one side to the other. If it succeeds then it summons a larger *Sinistar*-style enemy ship that spews bullets and generally acts a real nuisance. This larger ship can be destroyed but, as it quickly hones in on your ship's position and takes a lot of bullets, doing so can be pretty tricky.

With colourful visuals and some surprisingly addictive shoot and sweep gameplay, *Nova 2001* may not be the most frenzied shooter we've ever come across but we still found it an entertaining way to pass the time.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

BOSCONIAN 1981

A granddaddy of the multidirectional shooter, *Bosconian* inspired similar games, including *Sinistar*, *Time Pilot* and, we're guessing, *Nova 2001*. It was ported to the MSX, while a home computer sequel, titled *Bosconian 87*, later appeared on CPC, Spectrum and C64.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE 1999

Like *Oni*, *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* also made its gaming debut with an RPG game, which was released for the Super Nintendo. It found prominence however with this one-on-one brawler by Capcom, originally released in arcades and later converted for PlayStation and Dreamcast.



ONI – THE NINJA MASTER

■ **Developer:** Banpresto ■ **Year:** 1995 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **This obscure beat-'em-up** (known bizarrely as *Metamoqester* in the US) is a spin-off to an series of RPG games which have graced a surprising number of platforms, as far back as the Game Boy and Super Famicom to as recent as the DS. This offshoot cleverly takes some of the typical features of the JRPG genre – a squad of characters each able to summon or transmute into a powerful being battling giant monsters – and applies them pretty effectively to the beat-'em-up template. There are six huge and well-designed bosses to fight, and *Oni*'s big thing is the fact you have the option to fight them either alone or co-operatively. With only three selectable fighters the character roster is a bit on the lean side, but each does have a powerful alter ego they briefly transform into when performing special attacks. With striking anime visuals and some slick animation, its unusual team-up concept and some giant screen-filling boss characters, there's a lot we enjoyed about *Oni*. If you're a fan of JRPGs and beat-'em-ups be sure to check *Oni* out.



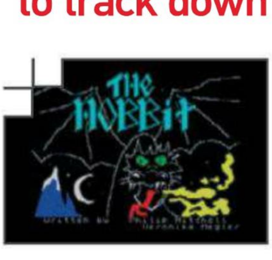
» [Arcade] *Oni* Tip #4: Don't choose a background that complements your character's colour scheme.

THE MAKING OF

The Hobbit



The Hobbit's due on the big screen at the end of the year, but it was once squeezed into 8-bit computers. Craig Grannell braves dragons and goblins to track down Veronika Megler, co-creator of the pioneering text adventure



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** MELBOURNE HOUSE
- » **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **PLATFORM:** TRS-80 (UNRELEASED) AND ZX SPECTRUM. CONVERTED TO AMSTRAD, BBC MICRO, C64, APPLE II, PC AND OTHERS
- » **GENRE:** TEXT ADVENTURE

Write the best adventure ever. That was the simple but challenging brief provided to Veronika Megler by Beam Software and Melbourne House co-founder Alfred Milgrom. At the time, Veronika was studying at Melbourne University and had been working late shifts as a computer operator. Wanting something better, little did she know that answering Alfred's bulletin board advertisement would lead to a part-time games programmer role and a place in gaming history.

Initially a fan of *Colossal Cave*, Veronika's approach in creating the 'best adventure ever' was to use her computer science skills and reinvent a genre. "*Colossal Cave* quickly became boring. Once you'd solved the game, it was always the same – there was nothing interesting from that point on," she explains. "And everyone at the time was writing interpreted BASIC – everything was hard-coded. You could dump memory to read an adventure's messages, which is how most people solved them at the time."

Veronika recalls how the basics of what would become *The Hobbit* were designed in just two hours on her first day on the job, inspired by computer science work she'd done at university: "I put down the whole concept of having a network or a replaceable database of locations, animals that each had a character that they played themselves, and how all of that would work. I designed it in such a way that rather than hard-coding everything, we could pull out and replace the database of characters and locations and end up with a different game." At the time, she and three friends collaborated on university projects, and they were, at her recommendation, hired by Alfred Milgrom, with Philip Mitchell subsequently co-authoring *The Hobbit*, primarily concentrating on the linguistics side of the game.

Soon after starting work on the project, it was clear that a theme was required, and it was Alfred who suggested *The Hobbit*. "That was very early on, within the first few weeks, and all of the key pieces that later turned into the game were already in place. It was then a case of building it all out," remembers

Veronika, who adds that the choice of theme was perfect: "We all knew *The Hobbit* and *The Lord Of The Rings* – I'd read the entire series several times by that point. To lay out the game, I went through the book, picking out key locations and pieces of the adventure that I could imagine how to turn into a puzzle or an interaction between characters and the player." Veronika recalls that this part of the job wasn't tricky, nor did it take long, and this enabled the team to tighten up everything within the game, thereby offering players the best experience: "We ended up doing a bunch of things. For starters, we wrote the whole thing in assembler, which drove me nuts during debugging, but it meant we had more power available than BASIC games. Also, Phil encoded the message database, so you couldn't dump memory to read the game's messages. More importantly, this gave us the ability to have a richer vocabulary, because we just had a dictionary of words, and sentences were built up out of pointers to those words. We could substitute in whatever the subject or object was that we needed, just as a little placeholder that allowed us to identify where the subject, the object and the verb went."

These breakthroughs in language and accessible interaction became cornerstones of *The Hobbit*'s development. Phil worked alongside an English major, who provided insight into grammar construction and worked out how to fashion a working parser within the confines of the TRS-80's memory, subsequently dubbed 'Inglish'. Veronika remembers Alfred being very much in favour of the game being approachable in this manner, and the writing of Inglish took as long as the rest of the game: "So Phil spent the entire year writing those pieces while I wrote the game, the characters, the interaction and the engine. There was a pretty clean interface between the two of us, because he would take anything somebody chucked in and turn it into the basic 'get sword'/'kill dwarf' kind of instructions most adventure games used then, and pass that to me to work with."

> "The design gave us a richer vocabulary, because we had a dictionary of words, and sentences were built up out of those"

As already noted, another of Veronika's goals with *The Hobbit* was to fashion a text adventure that was less linear, more flexible and more replayable than most of its predecessors: "The way I handled that was really just to add randomness. I'd had the basic idea that each animal was going to have a character and each character was also going to have a turn whenever the player did. We added a randomiser so whenever the game started, every animal would pick a random place within its character to start from." Each character was given a list of actions that cycled – something like: pick up randomly chosen object; go in random direction; if someone's in the room, give them a random object; go in a



» [Spectrum] Eschewing bulbs for massive flaming torches. It's the future.



» [Spectrum] Ooh, shiny! Best get all stabby with the dragon first, though, or he'll fry you for touching his jewels.

GET SUPPORT

ALTHOUGH VERONIKA RECEIVED barely any feedback regarding her work on *The Hobbit* when it was released, she says a steady stream of email now comes her way, and some are a little more bizarre than others: "One guy recently contacted me, and it was very funny. He said that 30 years ago he'd been playing his friend's copy of the game, opened the drive, and pulled it out while the game was playing. The disk corrupted and when his friend started playing again, a message appeared, the game crashed, and it never worked again. The guy had only recently admitted to himself that he'd wrecked his friend's copy of the game, and was contacting me to find out whether this message had any particular meaning or whether we'd coded it into the game for any specific purpose. I just had to laugh – it's 30 years later and someone's contacting me with a support request!"

THE MAKING OF







SHOW PICTURES

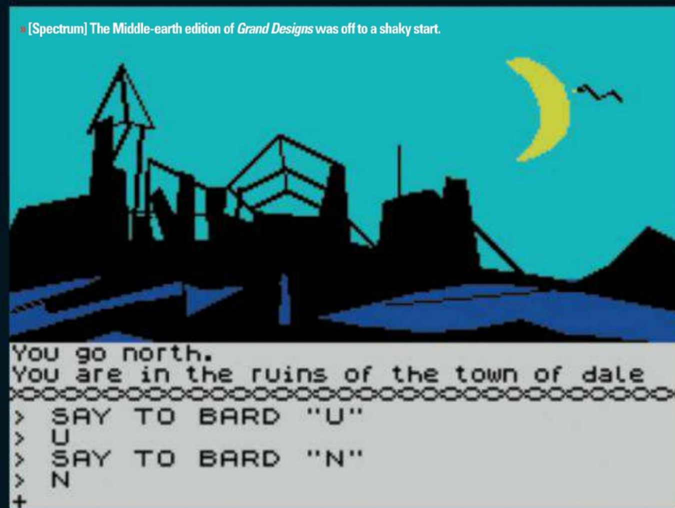
EARLY TEXT ADVENTURES were typically text-only affairs, but *The Hobbit* included illustrations of many locations. This, says Veronika, was in part down to the team's passion for arcade games: "We played *Scramble* and *Pac-Man* and wrote versions of them. And so, having created graphics-based games and played them at the arcades, the fact that adventure games had no graphics just seemed wrong to us. We didn't see them as that different a category, and so including graphics in *The Hobbit* seemed natural and reasonable."

According to Veronika, Alfred Milgrom was key to this approach: "I don't remember in many cases a specific person coming up with an idea and espousing it to the others. A lot of things came up as free-wheeling discussions where someone would have one part of the idea and someone else would take it further. By the time two hours had gone by, an idea would be very different from its starting point! Fred was always very supportive of letting us do that, even when it created more work and more investment on his side before he got any return. That was huge, because it was very much just him saying: 'Yes, I agree. If you think you should program that, go for it'. You don't find that much these days."

different randomly chosen direction and put a randomly chosen object down. The loop would be started in a random place and the character went off and did its thing. "Just the very interaction of the characters is what made the game complex at that point, and behaviour emerged out of that," adds Veronika.

While randomness provided *The Hobbit* with richness, it came at a price. "Trying to debug the game was a nightmare," remembers Veronika. "Our development machines would crash as the result of interactions and behaviours in some other part of the game. You had no idea – you just had a dump on your hands and had to figure out what had happened." Additionally, the manner in which characters behaved caused problematic scenarios: "You could end up in a situation where the game could not be completed successfully. Because the animals themselves interacted, they were playing the game, and they in general did not differentiate between a player and one of the other characters. It was possible for one to chance upon a location containing an aggressor who would kill them, and if that character was someone you needed to do things, you wouldn't be able to complete the game. You might not find out for several hours of playing [laughs], but that's just the way it was! I didn't make any attempt to stop that, because I thought it was cool."

We proffer that these behind-the-scenes interactions may be why the game gained a reputation for being buggy, with players mistaking bugs for the way the game actually worked. "I think that's true," says Veronika. "And there were certain other things that happened. We'd get reports from people who'd done things in the game that never really occurred to us." In part, this



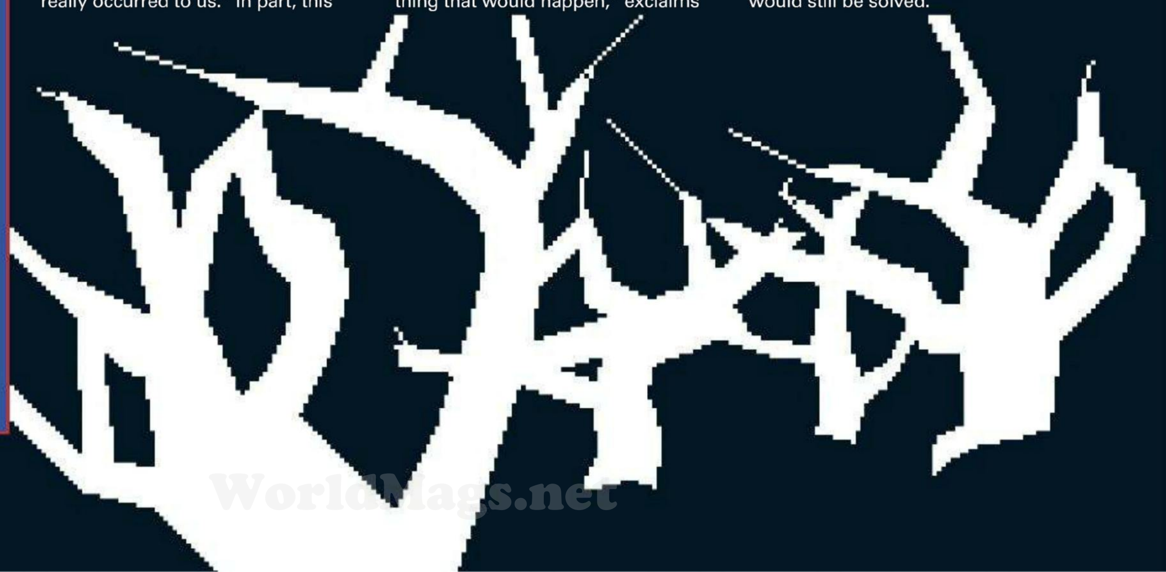
[Spectrum] The Middle-earth edition of *Grand Designs* was off to a shaky start.

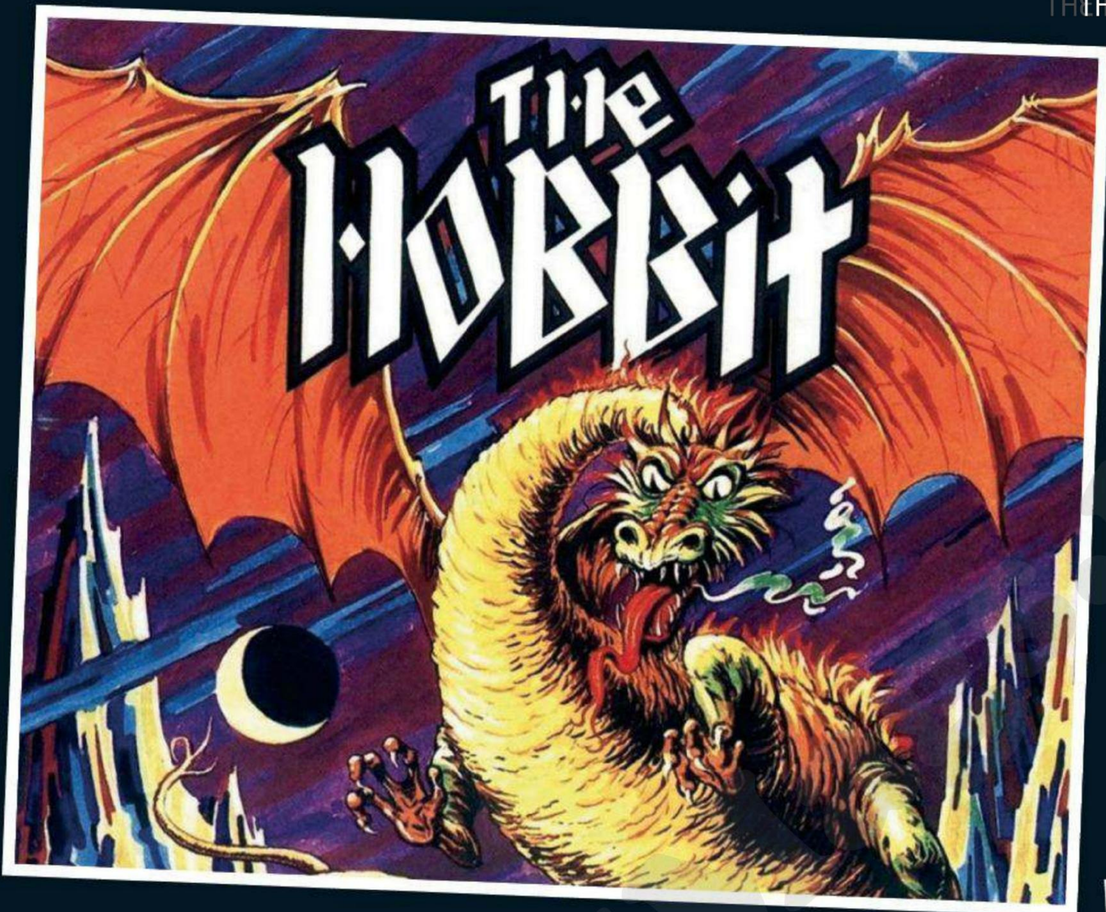
was due to the game largely being based around general concepts: "For example, one might say someone could pick up something as long as the object was lighter than them. And there were places with small doors you couldn't get through when carrying many things. But these were all very general, and so reports arrived from people doing a combination of things that were possible conceptually but that we'd never thought of. But we made no attempt to try and stop it either!"

An example found in various walkthroughs involves the Bard, who can be tricky to give directions to; the recommendation is to carry him. "Yes, right! That's exactly the kind of thing that would happen," exclaims Veronika. "We were always running into 'bugs' that were literally there as a result of the complete flexibility of the game, as opposed to games at the time that programmed in a small number of things you were allowed to do in a small number of locations. They were easier to test

> If that character died, you wouldn't be able to complete the game. I didn't make any attempt to stop that, because I thought it was cool

because there was no way to do anything that was not specifically allowed!" *The Hobbit*'s system was almost the opposite: instead of strict solutions, there were a small number of puzzles that had to be solved in specific ways, but most merely had a set of conditions that needed to be met. If you managed to meet those conditions in a way different to how Veronika had imagined, the problem would still be solved.







DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

LORD OF THE RINGS: GAME ONE (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC, BBC MICRO, DRAGON 32/64, APPLE II, PC AND OTHERS
YEAR: 1986

SHERLOCK
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, C64
YEAR: 1984

SHADOWS OF MORDOR
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1987

Along with being immersed in technology, another of Veronika's tasks was to ensure that the adventure's text retained the flavour of Tolkien's book but also worked within the context of the game itself. "I don't remember that as being particularly difficult, because I was very familiar with the book and loved it," she says. "And I really did go through and pick things almost directly out of the book and then make minor modifications so it was easier to imagine the passages of text within the context of the game."

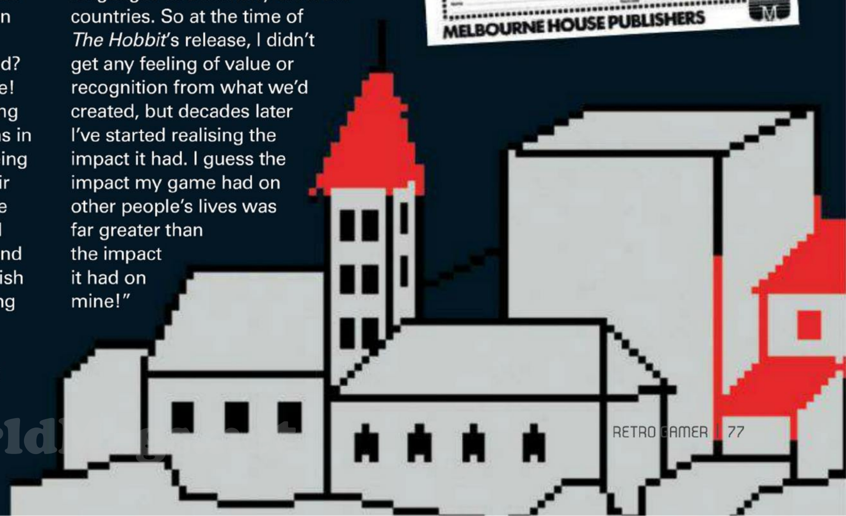
One minor struggle was with Gollum's riddles. "I used several that were in the book," says Veronika, "but then I had to come up with others that were like enough that they didn't stand out as obviously having been written by someone else, but different enough from ones Gollum already used. I remember that taking quite a bit of time and quite a few attempts before I came up with something I thought was reasonable. But, really, a lot of the writing happened very quickly. It was a case of when inspiration hits, you get as much as you can while the inspiration's there!"

The Hobbit progressed remarkably well throughout the first year, but upheaval occurred as the project neared completion. Additional people were brought in for testing, and on graduation from university Veronika left to join IBM, although Philip remained. Despite staying in touch with friends, Veronika tells us she didn't really keep tabs on *The Hobbit* once it was released: "I heard very little about it. In fact, I was told by a few people that it was an absolutely terrible game, although I knew it had sold very well."

We suggest this doesn't tally with reviews from the time. "Yeah, but one of the people who told me was a science fiction author," responds Veronika. Perhaps he wasn't a fan of Tolkien, or was annoyed that Gandalf could get randomly killed? Veronika laughs. "That's possible! But at the time, I was pretty young and didn't have too many lessons in balance regarding what I was being told. And when I joined IBM, their attitude was 'so, you think you've done a little programming?', and they hired me at the same rate and level as people who'd done English degrees. I got no kudos for having written *The Hobbit*!"

More recently, Veronika says the internet has changed things: "I started getting letters from people who'd tracked me down online, telling me the game had changed their life and got them into adventure games, how they'd learned English to play the game, and how it had changed their interests, their character, and even their plans for the future!" Talked into giving a presentation by a student at the university where she's now studying for her PhD, Veronika began looking online for imagery. "It was only then I discovered *The Hobbit* had been released in a whole bunch of languages and in many different countries. So at the time of *The Hobbit*'s release, I didn't get any feeling of value or recognition from what we'd created, but decades later I've started realising the impact it had. I guess the impact my game had on other people's lives was far greater than the impact it had on mine!"





» [Spectrum] *The Hobbit* was developed on the TRS-80, but focus was shifted to the ZX Spectrum when it was obvious how popular the rubber-keyed wonder would be.

Future Classic



Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **Featured System:** Xbox
- **Year Released:** 2002
- **Publisher:** Sega
- **Developer:** Smilebit
- **Key People:** Masayoshi Kikuchi (director), Kazuhisa Hasuoka (chief programmer), Hideki Naganuma (music)

GO DEEPER

- ***Jet Set Radio*** **was rumoured for an update on Nintendo's Wii, but such a version never materialised.**
- **The Latch Brothers, Guitar Vader and BS 2000 are just a few of the artists featured on JSRF's soundtrack.**

JET SET RADIO FUTURE

20.

It was the sequel that should never have happened, but Sega went ahead and released it anyway. Darran Jones grabs his skates and looks back at one of the best sequels to ever hit Microsoft's Xbox

THE BACKGROUND

Jet Set Radio was one of the Dreamcast's most exciting and innovative games. With stunning cel-shaded visuals and a killer soundtrack, it depicted graffiti as an art form and proved that, when it came to innovation, Sega remained a force to be reckoned with. *Jet Set Radio* (or *Jet Grind Radio*, as it was known in the States) proved an instant hit with those who played it, mainly because there was nothing else quite like it on either the Dreamcast or any other console at the time. It's worth remembering that upon *Jet Set Radio*'s original release, cel-shading was a relatively new rendering technique.

Jet Set Radio also courted controversy, with the game falling foul of San Francisco's mayor, who was attempting to abolish graffiti in the city while Sega held a 'Graffiti is Art' contest just a few short blocks away. The winner went on to win $5,000.

Sadly, despite attracting a cult following, *Jet Set Radio* wasn't a hit, and it appeared that the Dreamcast would be its final resting place. Sega had other ideas, though, and during the 2001 Tokyo Game Show it announced that *Jet Set Radio Future* would be released exclusively on Microsoft's Xbox.

Jet Set Radio Future was announced alongside new iterations of *Sega GT*, *Panzer Dragoon* and the former Dreamcast title *GunValkyrie*, further fuelling rumours that Microsoft had been trying to secure Sega as an exclusive first-party developer.

THE GAME

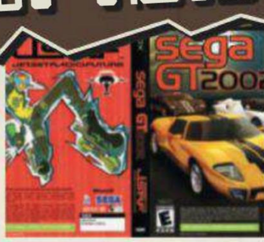
When *Jet Set Radio Future* was released in February 2002, it polarised fans of the original, mainly because Sega had made a number of significant changes to the core gameplay mechanics of the original Dreamcast game. The biggest difference was in the ease of tagging. In the Dreamcast original, you created your graffiti tags – used to show your dominance over rival skating gangs – by twisting the analogue stick in increasingly complex patterns to simulate the shaking of a spray can. This in itself created a risk/reward system, because you had to stand still to spray, allowing the chasing police to potentially capture you. Graffiti spots came in three different sizes as well, meaning you'd have to constantly return to the same location to complete your work while you shook off dogged pursuers. *Jet Set Radio Future*, on the other hand, was more interested in

Things of note



Music man

Hideki Naganuma's marvellous tunes add massively to *Jet Set Radio Future*'s atmosphere, as his unique mix of funk, soul and Japanese techno really pumps you up.



Double up

Both *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Sega GT 2002* were released together in a special double pack. This disc also plays on Xbox 360s, with a few slowdown issues.



Jet Set Radio HD

Sega has finally announced that the original *Jet Set Radio* will be appearing on PSN, PC and Xbox Live Arcade. Hopefully this means we'll get *Future* as well.



Tag 'em and bag 'em

Although you could still create your own graffiti tags, the Xbox didn't allow you to upload them online for others to use, as was possible in the Dreamcast original.



Multi-mayhem

Jet Set Radio Future features multiplayer modes that range from completing a lap before your opponents to keeping hold of a ball for as long as possible.



» [Xbox] One of the only downsides of grinding is that it's a little too easy to attach to rails when you don't want to.



» [Xbox] There are a motley selection of characters in *Future*, 13 of which are secret.



What the press thought

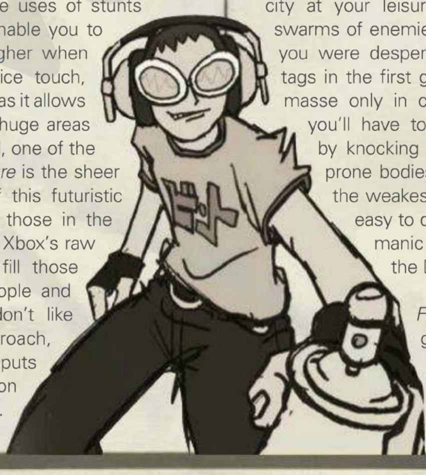
Gaming Target
Score: 9.3/10
"*JSRF*'s gameplay is fun and extremely addictive, but unfortunately it's not without its faults."



GameSpot UK
Score: 8.7/10
"Despite a few rough edges, *Jet Set Radio Future* manages to shine because of its addictive, original gameplay and its stunning graphics."

keeping the player on the move, so a simple press of a trigger was more than enough for your oddball crew of characters to do their thing, regardless of the size of the area you had to respray.

There's a far greater emphasis on grinding too, and more of a need to use tricks. Though present, the trick system was pretty throwaway in the original game, but multiple uses of stunts in *Jet Set Radio Future* enable you to move faster and jump higher when using half-pipes. It's a nice touch, particularly when grinding, as it allows you to move through the huge areas far more efficiently. Indeed, one of the other nice touches of *Future* is the sheer depth of it. The areas of this futuristic Tokyo are far larger than those in the Dreamcast game, and the Xbox's raw power enabled Sega to fill those streets with far more people and vehicles. While purists don't like this new 'bloated' approach, we actually prefer it, as it puts a far greater emphasis on exploring the vibrant world.



We also prefer the general structure of *Future* to the original. The core gameplay is effectively the same – rival gangs are taking over Tokyo and your gang, the GGs, are trying to reclaim territory – but it's a lot easier. This is mainly because the tight time limit that featured in *Jet Set Radio* has been abolished, allowing you to explore the city at your leisure. Another difference is the swarms of enemies that would attack you while you were desperately trying to complete your tags in the first game. Enemies now attack en masse only in certain marked off areas, and you'll have to defeat all of them, typically by knocking them down and tagging their prone bodies, to continue. This is perhaps the weakest addition to *Future*, as it's too easy to dispatch enemies and lacks the manic urgency that was present in the Dreamcast original.

Ultimately, *Jet Set Radio Future* is more of the same great game, only slightly easier, more accessible and more refined – something we're perfectly happy with.

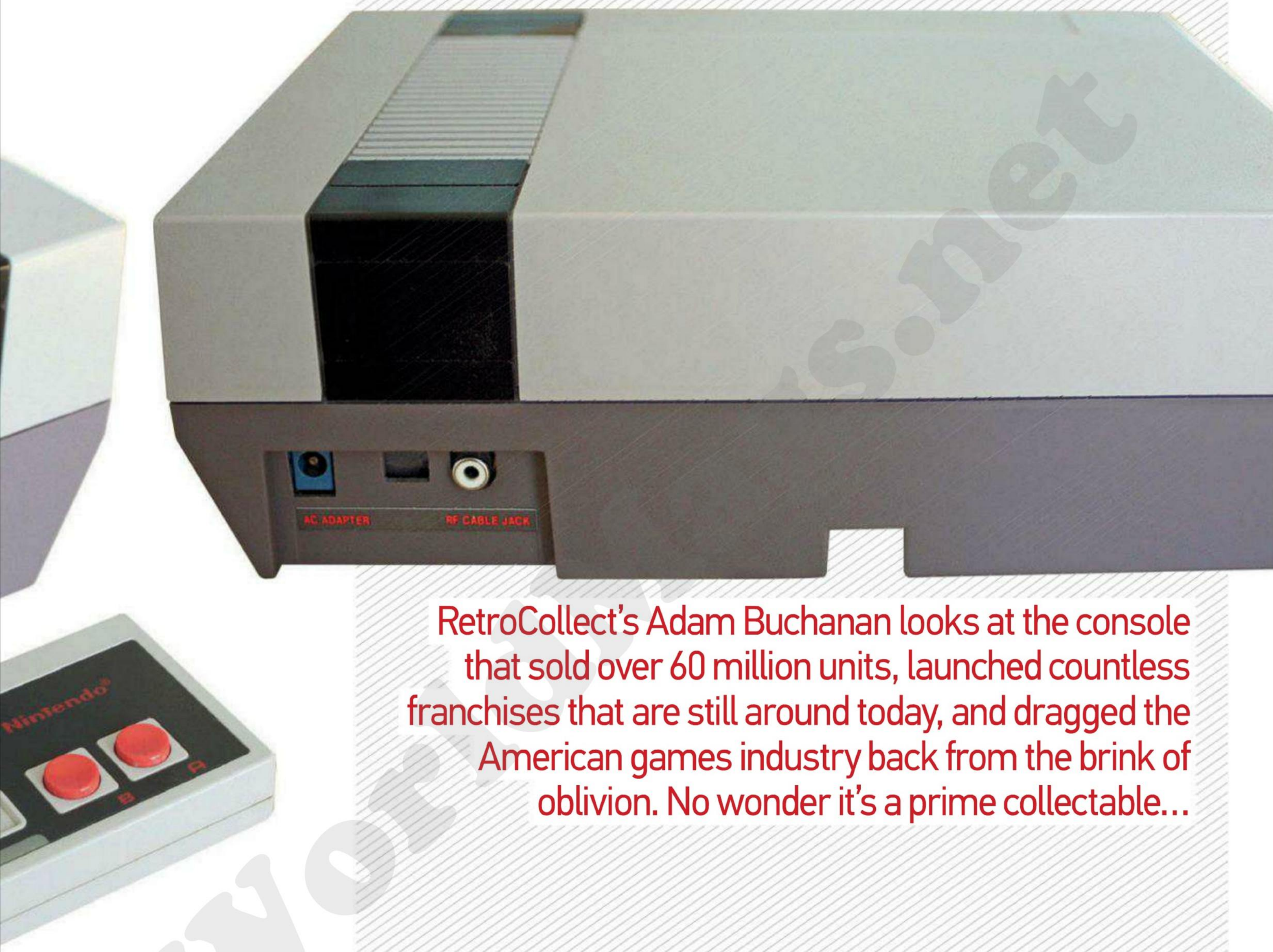
WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Jet Set Radio Future remains an excellent game, with a structure that's every bit as elegant as its stunning cel-shaded visuals. Yes, Sega made concessions in certain gameplay elements, but they were never at the expense of fun, and fun is one thing that *Jet Set Radio Future* has in abundance. Fuelled by the same style of music – a diverse mixture that included Japanese techno, funk, acid jazz and rock – that powered the original, and featuring plenty of fast-paced action, it's a truly enjoyable title that will cause you to play with a big smile across your face. It could be argued that, by making the sequel more accessible to newcomers, Sega lost some of the original magic that made *Jet Set Radio* feel so special, but we really don't accept that this is the case.

For many, Sega was at its most innovative during the Dreamcast years, while Xbox releases like *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, *ToeJam & Earl III: Mission To Earth* and *GunValkyrie* proved that it was still happy to take risks. *Jet Set Radio Future* may be a decade old now, but age has done nothing to diminish its beauty, style or gameplay.



NINTENDO ENTERT



RetroCollect's Adam Buchanan looks at the console that sold over 60 million units, launched countless franchises that are still around today, and dragged the American games industry back from the brink of oblivion. No wonder it's a prime collectable…

» **Manufacturer:** Nintendo » **Models:** NES/Famicom » **Launched:** 1983 (Japan, as Famicom), 1985 (US), 1986 (Europe) » **Country of origin:** Japan

AINMENT SYSTEM

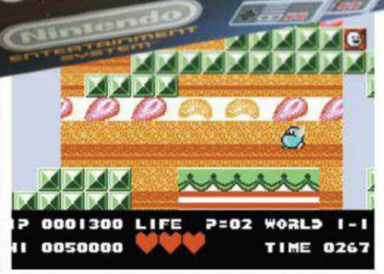
Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM™ NES VERSION

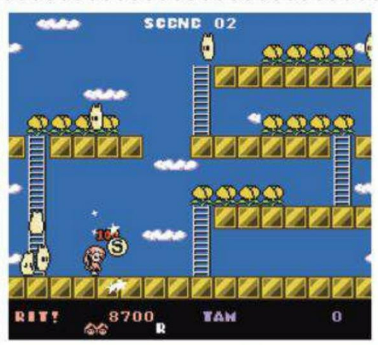
The Collector's Guide



» There are numerous hardware bundles out there, from *Super Mario Bros 2* to the ever-popular *Super Mario Bros* and *Duck Hunt* combo.







» With its roots in 8-bit micros and their open publishing models, Codemasters wasn't initially keen on bending to Nintendo's control.



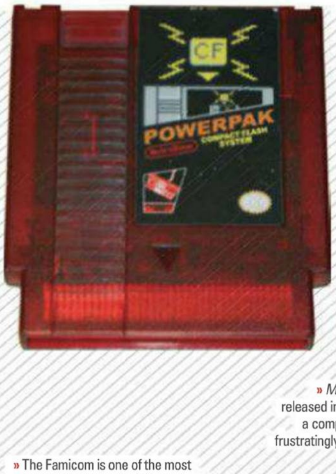
Why it's collectable

In 1983, Nintendo unleashed one of Japan's finest products to date. The Family Computer (Famicom) was the latest 8-bit console to be released, and it would become the bestselling system available by the end of 1984. Upon its US launch, the rebranded Famicom, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), refuelled the country's dying videogame industry. Homeward bound, however, what did Europeans have to get excited about with the iconic console? It certainly wasn't the lack of localised releases, nor the fact that Nintendo really took its time delivering what the rest of the world was already talking about…

Prior to the console's European release, gamers had been drowning in an ocean of low-quality software. Atari had exhausted the 2600 with just about everything its dated hardware could handle, while home computers began to suffer from a heavily saturated market of homemade releases. Nintendo was aware of these issues and proceeded to offer gamers the lifeline they had been crying out for. Not only did the NES sail in with state-of-the-art visuals and a stunning audio chip, but also Nintendo's Seal of Quality. This restricted developers to no more than five games for the system per year, ensuring that focus was placed on quality, not quantity.

With such a huge focus on hosting software of the highest merit, it comes as a real surprise how many games were made available. An incredible tally of over 1,000 cartridges were distributed for the Famicom. A large majority of these, among a wealth of exclusive additions, went on to make up the 700-plus games in the American NES library. Europe, however, had to make do with just shy of 350 licensed releases. This deficiency of cartridges in PAL territories encompassed several big losses, including *Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Quest* and even the sixth outing of *Mega Man*. Despite a diminished selection, adoring fans from all over the world have begun to home in on the handful of exclusive PAL localisations attainable. To name a few, these include a solid port of the arcade classic *Rodland*, the elusive Metroidvania title *Ufouria*, and Konami's take on a Biblical game with *Noah's Ark*.

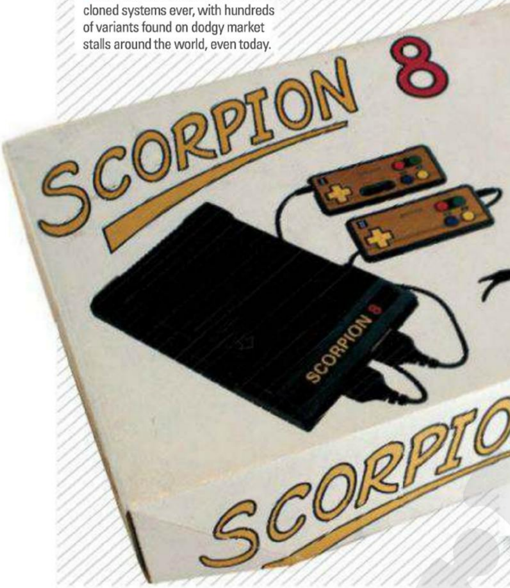
In order to aid gamers wanting a better grip on the on-screen action, countless peripherals, which took gaming in previously unimaginable directions, began to see mass manufacture. While many of these offered little functionality in the way of gameplay, some have since become an integral part of game culture. ROB (Robotic Operating Buddy), a mechanical being who took commands as player two, and the Power Glove, a garment-turned-control-pad that supposedly placed precision into the palm of your hand, have both become highly desirable items, despite their limited usability. While these are the premium offerings, the NES has its fair share of laughable accessories. The bizarre Laserscope headset, for instance, was intended for use on flight simulation games, requiring the player to self-consciously shout 'Fire' every time an enemy flew into sight. Overall, the arrival of the revolutionary console brought along many ambitious



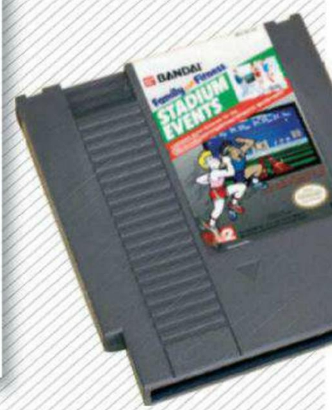


» *Mega Man 6* was never released in PAL regions, making a complete series collection frustratingly impossible to obtain.

» The Famicom is one of the most cloned systems ever, with hundreds of variants found on dodgy market stalls around the world, even today.







Did you know?

■ In 1987, Bandai released a floor mat controller for the NES known as Family Fun Fitness. This primitive attempt to keep gamers fit saw the arrival of two compatible games, before Nintendo bought the rights to the technology and rebranded it as the Power Pad. Prior to this acquisition, the American version of the second compatible game, *Stadium Events*, was only available during a brief seasonal period. So few copies sold that growing demand to secure *Stadium Events* today has given rise to some hefty prices. In 2010, a factory-sealed copy fetched $41,300 at auction. European collectors, however, can rest easy, as the PAL version is not as rare and commands only a fraction of this astonishing price.

accessories that wouldn't even advance beyond the drawing board if pitched today.

If the thought of shouting at your TV isn't enough to entice you towards Nintendo's creation, maybe the import side of the system can win you over, with many Famicom-exclusive add-ons and releases available. For example, the Famicom Disk System attached itself underneath the console, introducing a new disk-based media format upon which software could be supplied. One of the most notable and exclusive arrivals on this new medium, which missed out on a cartridge release in Japan, was *Bubble Bobble*. The list of unusual additions continues with the likes of a keyboard combined with software to program your very own games, 3D glasses, karaoke systems, and even a modem to bring the vintage hardware online.

While the majority of these obscurities were limited to Japan, the UK also had its fair share of intriguing, albeit unlicensed, additions. British software developer Codemasters released a handful of games for the NES, all of which were released without an official licence. Without the authentic development hardware, an unauthorised method to bypass the system's security was crafted, allowing games like *Dizzy* and *Cosmic Spacehead* to make their Nintendo debuts. Codemasters later went on to ruffle Nintendo's feathers further by manufacturing an unofficial cheat cartridge known as the Game Genie. This device was quickly accused of being a violation of copyright law by Nintendo, resulting in lawsuits arriving on Codemasters' doorstep. Much to everyone's surprise, the company managed to win the courts over and was allowed to continue selling the device. While Codemasters would later gain Nintendo's permission to release games on its consoles, it enjoyed a free ride on the back of the NES's success for many years.

As we reminisce over Nintendo's 8-bit console and how it previously held the record for the bestselling system of all time, it's only natural to assume that items are readily available. While this statement might hold true for the likes of *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend Of Zelda*, acquiring a complete PAL NES library is a collector's worst nightmare, due to many publishers deciding to limit which games were released in each country. To put this into perspective, you'd need to cruise to Spain to grab *City Connection*, go globe-trotting towards Australia to secure *Aussie Rules Footy*, enjoy the sights of Scandinavia while seizing *Mr Gimmick*, stop by France for *Lethal Weapon* and then return to the UK to locate *Mario Is Missing*. To make matters worse, *Phantom Air Mission* and *Snowboard Challenge*, two incredibly elusive Spanish exclusives, are rarities that could put the infamous American gold Nintendo World Championships cartridge to shame. If anything, the PAL NES collection could be the hardest of them all to obtain.

With all of this in mind, it has to be said that although the PAL NES library holds an incredible amount of depth and enjoyment within, it is by far the most daunting. Should you be able to look beyond the challenges ahead and have the finances to foot the bill, you'll be set for one of the most thrilling retro gaming hunts you could ever imagine.

THE PERIPHERALS





» ROB has since made cameos in games as varied as *Kirby's Dream Land 3*, *Pikmin 2*, *Mario Kart DS* and *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

» ROB's complicated-looking accessories don't make him appear particularly accessible to play with.

Robotic Operating Buddy

If there is anything Nintendo is known for, it's innovation. The Japanese gaming giant has always known how we want to enjoy our games, years in advance. Although the masterminds there are usually on the money, they have occasionally missed the mark and quietly swept it under the carpet. Sadly, ROB falls into this category of tried and tested gimmicks.

The Robotic Operating Buddy was Nintendo's big idea for 1985. Understanding the limitations of videogames being two-dimensional forms of entertainment, Nintendo released the Family Robot, as it was known in Japan, to break down the fourth wall. Once it was placed somewhere in front of the TV, this unusual character would await commands from the on-screen action. Up, down, left, right, open and close were the motions to which this mechanical being would respond – more than enough for Nintendo to sculpt a game around it.

Gyromite was the first title released under the 'Robot Series' label to utilise this new hardware. Our new robotic friend was set to become our second player, once equipped with the vast array of gear included. This attire consisted of a pair of gripping gloves, two spinning gyroscopes, an attachment to hold the second control pad and press the A and B buttons, a motor to spin the gyroscopes, and two empty trays to deposit the inactive gyroscopes. This abundant selection of robot accessories, in turn, would supposedly create the new experience we had all been waiting for.

Despite the complicated setup, the idea behind the robot's input was dead simple. *Gyromite*'s gameplay required you to manipulate elevating red and blue pillars, which could only be achieved by input from the second control pad. As the supporting controller was firmly lodged in one of the robot's attachments, it was up to you to send the right on-screen commands to ROB to clear your path. This was accomplished by rotating the robot in the direction of the gyroscope spinner, closing his grip on a gyroscope, moving back around to the attachment holding the control pad, and then lowering the spinning gyroscope onto one of the coloured concave buttons. Upon doing so, the weight of the gyroscope would press down on the lever, forcing the attachment to press a button on the second control pad and making the matching coloured pillar on screen traverse in the opposite direction. Although this process was straightforward enough, getting the commands to ROB was the hard part. Roaming enemies on the screen made you think twice about pausing your movement to communicate beyond the television.

Although Nintendo did release another game under the Robot Series (*Stack-Up*), the Robotic Operating Buddy became a short-lived one-trick pony. Whether this was down to the lack of directions in which to expand gameplay or simply due to poor sales, ROB has lived to tell his tale by not only becoming a cult icon, but also by making various cameo appearances in Nintendo games through the years.

...AND THE REST



01



02



03



04



05



06



07

01. Game Genie

■ Galoob's efforts to blow NES games wide open with memory-hacking cheats were met with a legal battle with Nintendo over what the console manufacturer considered a violation of copyright law. As Nintendo eventually lost the case against the Game Genie, gamers have since been enjoying the unauthorised offerings of Mario's moonwalking ability and Link's never-ending supply of rupees.

02. U-Force

■ Although motion controls didn't begin to materialise in a big way until 2006, Brøderbund took a stab at creating a futuristic hands-free controller in 1989. This device used perpendicular infra-red sensor panels to relay the player's physical movement to the NES. Despite a forward-thinking approach, the U-Force would only recognise the occasional interaction before becoming a bargain bin special.

03. Four Score

■ Long before the Nintendo 64 sported a wealth of controller ports, the NES had its very own party-hosting device. With a selection of games supporting Nintendo's much earlier answer to multiplayer gaming, the Four Score doubled up the available controller ports, despite an inconceivable tangle of wires.

04. NES Advantage

■ With countless arcade games being ported to the NES, it made perfect sense to bring the true coin-op experience home. The Advantage arcade stick was Nintendo's answer to tactile controls with an authentic feel, without the need for a pocket full of change.

05. Family Fun Fitness Pad

■ In the days before *Wii Fit* branded videogames as a healthy activity, Bandai attempted to get us off our backsides and on our feet. Using similar technology to the later *Dance Dance Revolution* mat, the Family Fun Fitness Pad, renamed the Power Pad in the US, took a real beating from the bundled *Track & Field*-style games in *Athletic World*.

06. Turbo Touch 360

■ Where control pads are concerned, the Turbo Touch 360 is quite possibly the worst of all time. Despite being backed by a promising ad campaign, promoting its touch sensor for "effortless movement in all directions", you'd be lucky to get any response out of this technology.

07. Power Glove

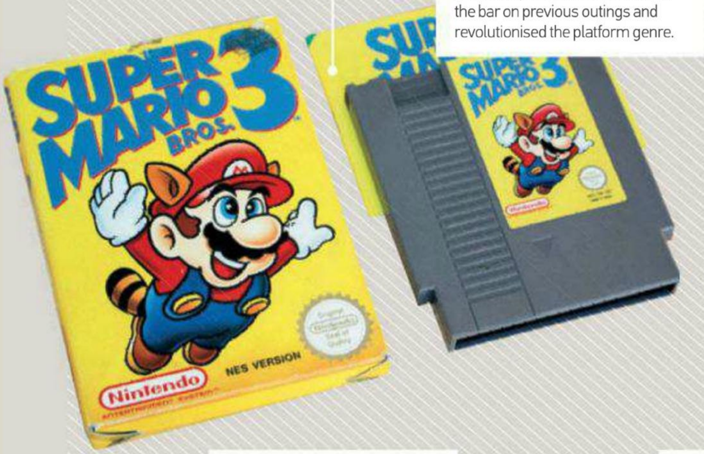
■ "Now you're playing with power." At least that's what they hoped you'd think as you slipped on the Power Glove. This wearable control pad relied heavily on ultrasonic speakers to read your arm's movement, albeit very poorly. Even after an obtrusive placement in the film *The Wizard*, this accessory failed to succeed.

Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM™ NES VERSION

The Collector's Guide

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

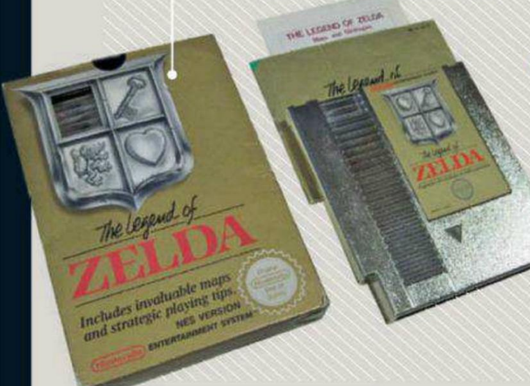
Super Mario Bros 3
■ Arguably the greatest *Mario* game to date, *Super Mario Bros 3* raised the bar on previous outings and revolutionised the platform genre.



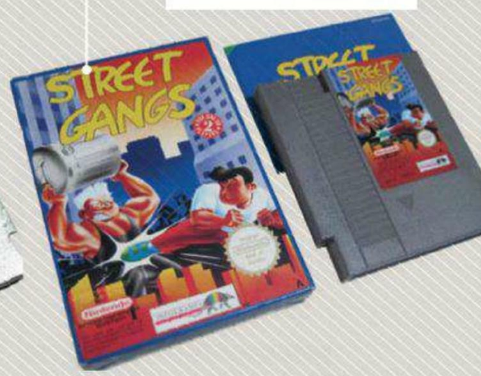
Mr Gimmick
■ Underestimating the cutesy appeal of *Mr Gimmick* will be your first mistake in this challenging platformer. Underneath that adorable exterior is one of Sunsoft's finest yet trickiest creations.



The Legend Of Zelda
■ Link's first outing paved the way for one of the greatest series of all time, and it also became a benchmark for many other adventure games to follow.



Street Gangs
■ More commonly known today by its American title of *River City Ransom*, the cast of the *Kunio-kun* series returned in a no-holds-barred RPG brawler.



Mega Man 2
■ With a rewired circuit and a host of upgrades available, the blue bomber had returned! *Mega Man 2* not only packed a punch in gameplay, but left behind one of the greatest soundtracks to date.



PLAY THESE NEXT



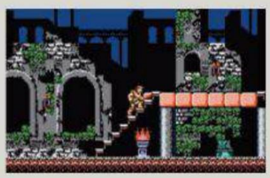
Super Mario Bros 2
■ After Nintendo USA deemed the Japanese sequel to *Super Mario Bros* too difficult, *Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic* was redesigned to feature characters from the *Mario* series. Although not a true *Mario* game, *Super Mario Bros 2* was a fantastic platformer in its own right, only made better by the arrival of the plumbers.



DuckTales
■ Despite being created for the youth of yesteryear, *DuckTales* is still one of the most enjoyable NES platformers today. While this could be said for the majority of Capcom's output under the Disney brand, Scrooge McDuck's money-pilfering adventures have stood the test of time thanks to the clear inspiration from the *Mega Man* series.



Ufouria: The Saga
■ While many would turn to *Metroid* for their non-linear side-scrolling explorations, little do they know that they're overlooking another shining example under the Sunsoft name. When Bop-Louie's friends suffer from amnesia after stumbling into a large chasm, it's up to you to restore the memories of the residents of Ufouria.

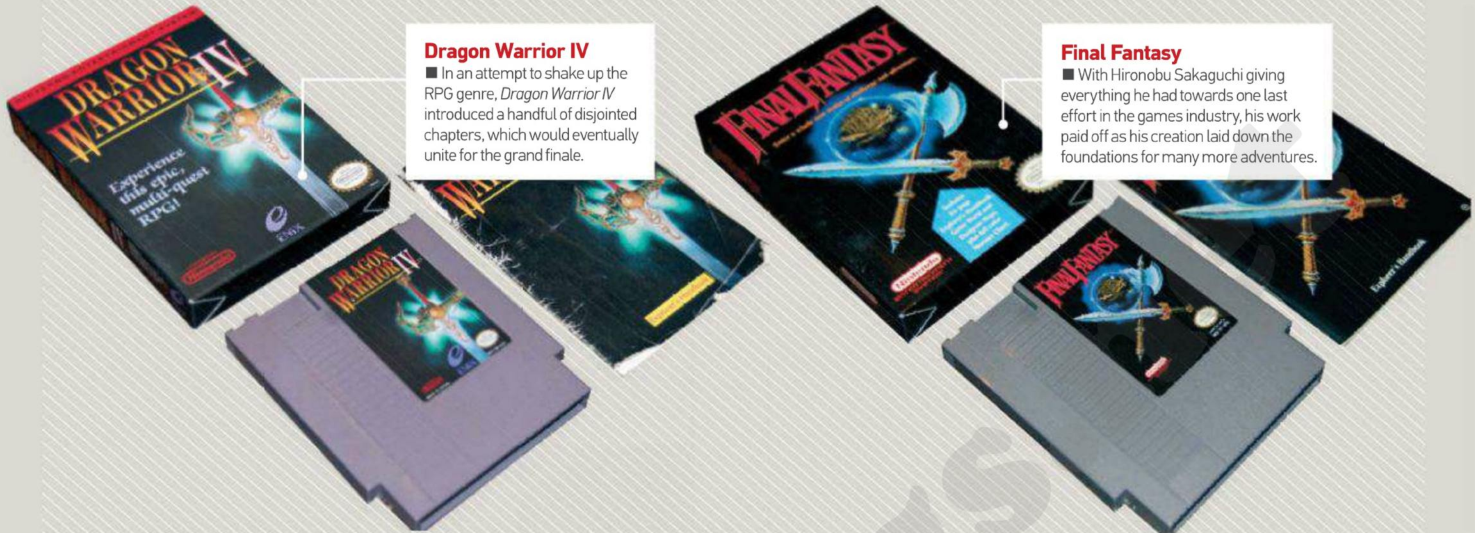


Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse
■ After an embarrassing first sequel riddled with frustrating dialogue boxes and time-consuming transitions between day and night, *Castlevania III* rectified any issues. The third and final *Castlevania* game on the 8-bit system was a more than memorable title with plenty of challenges within.



Punch-Out!!
■ The 1987 boxing simulator re-imagined the sporting genre by introducing a more tactical yet arcade-based approach. Button-bashers were quickly penalised and made to focus on mastering Little Mac's sweeps and blows. That said, using these skills against the cameo appearance of Mike Tyson was a challenge in its own right.

TOP IMPORT GAMES



Dragon Warrior IV

■ In an attempt to shake up the RPG genre, *Dragon Warrior IV* introduced a handful of disjointed chapters, which would eventually unite for the grand finale.

Final Fantasy

■ With Hironobu Sakaguchi giving everything he had towards one last effort in the games industry, his work paid off as his creation laid down the foundations for many more adventures.



The Krion Conquest

■ What do you get if you sprinkle a dash of magical power upon the *Mega Man* series? *The Krion Conquest*. This release was by no means shy in showcasing its admiration for the blue bomber.

Crystalis

■ Although *The Legend Of Zelda* stole the limelight for the action-adventure genre, SNK's *Crystalis* came astonishingly close to taking centre stage away from Link.

Bubble Bobble Part 2

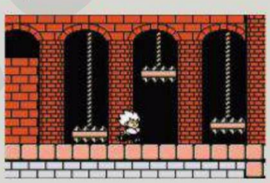
■ Never released in the arcades, this attempt to offer the dino duo a sequel was an awe-inspiring hit featuring strikingly bright visuals and an enhanced take on the original.

IMPORT THESE NEXT



Yume Penguin Monogatari

■ While most games encourage gobbling up any leftover food, the aim of *Yume Penguin Monogatari* is to lose as much weight as possible to win back your significant other. Although incredibly easy, the platformer combined with a few shmup levels is a refreshing change from the fast-paced action we all indulge in.



Akumajo Special: Boku Dracula-kun

■ Known as *Kid Dracula*, this adorable Famicom platformer is, in fact, a relatively obscure parody of the *Castlevania* series. Instead of assuming the role of Simon Belmont, you must take control of a super-deformed Dracula and throw the dinosaur Galamoth off your throne.



Bio Miracle Bokutte Upa

■ Unfairly dubbed as 'Baby Mario' by countless online sources, Konami's sickeningly adorable adventure has much more to it than its perceived attempt to explore the plumber's early days. With nearly every level resembling, or at least containing, various edible elements, you'll find your stomach rumbling as you progress.



Super Mario Bros 2

■ Although it was suggested to be too complex for anyone outside Japan, the true sequel to *Super Mario Bros* became a Japan-only secret – at least until the arrival of *Super Mario All-Stars*. In all fairness, the increase in difficulty between the two games was rather considerable and incredibly daunting, justifying the decision from above.



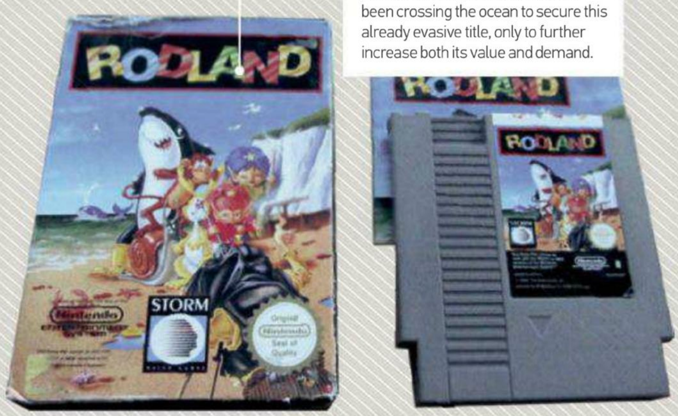
Moon Crystal

■ Taking the best mechanisms from Jordan Mechner's *Prince Of Persia*, the little-known platform adventure *Moon Crystal* not only offered solid gameplay but beautiful animation by 8-bit standards. Despite being a potential bestseller, the product of the previously unknown developer, Hect, remained a Japanese exclusive.

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

Rodland

■ Having skipped a release in America, US collectors have since been crossing the ocean to secure this already evasive title, only to further increase both its value and demand.



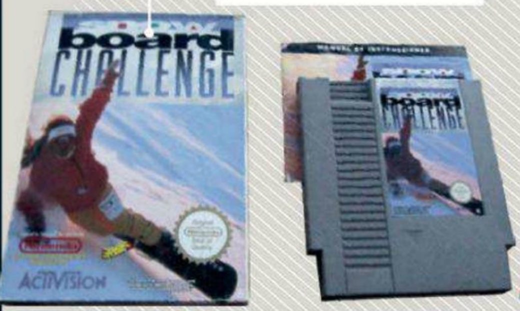
Phantom Air Mission

■ With a stupidly limited release in Spain, this unplayable and almost laughable attempt at bringing flight simulation to the NES was quickly forgotten.



Snowboard Challenge

■ Also hailing in very limited numbers from Spain, the European localisation of *Heavy Shreddin'*, titled *Snowboard Challenge*, made next to no impact on gamers whatsoever.



RC Pro-Am II

■ While many of the rarest videogames often attract flies, *RC Pro-Am II* stands out as a fantastic Scandinavia-exclusive sequel to one of the best NES racers.



The Trolls In Crazyland

■ Although the popular fluorescent-haired dolls could once be found in every child's grasp, their 1992 outing on the NES has since become a considerable rarity.



GET THESE NEXT



City Connection

■ If the trend of Spanish exclusives is becoming too much, look away now. *City Connection* is yet another scarce addition to the list of Spain's finest offerings. The arcade port of this bizarre car-based platformer follows the original very closely, leaving many PAL gamers puzzled as to why it wasn't sold in greater quantities.



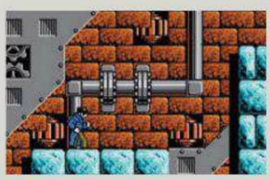
Solomon's Key 2

■ Anyone who had grown fond of the original *Solomon's Key* was in for a surprise once the follow-up arrived. Tecmo decided to reinvent the series with a prequel by dropping the block-mastering gameplay for that of a puzzle involving the elements. Germany, Scandinavia and Spain are where this oddity can be found.



Super Mario Bros & Tetris & Nintendo World Cup

■ While you wouldn't expect a common game bundled with the NES to be here, this is a secret among die-hard collectors. There was an extremely rare boxed version released, which has quickly become the most expensive piece of Nintendo-branded cardboard around.



Darkman

■ The movie adaptation of the 1990 superhero film was developed by the British studio Ocean, only to find itself released exclusively in Spain. Going by the rest of its extensive catalogue, *Darkman* was far from one of Ocean's better offerings, perhaps explaining why this elusive release was never sold on the turf where it was developed.



The Flintstones: The Surprise At Dinosaur Peak

■ Americans were unlucky in that *The Surprise At Dinosaur Peak* was limited to a rental release, but Europeans have faced just as much difficulty in locating retail versions. Those hoping to obtain Fred Flintstone's second adventure need to look towards Italy and Scandinavia.



THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

If you're looking for a rare PAL NES game that feels genuinely unique, this is the item you should seek out for your collection





What makes it so special?

■ The Miracle Piano Teaching System included a standalone electronic keyboard that could interact with the NES. The bundled tutoring cartridge offered a more enjoyable game-led approach to learning the piano, guiding you from nursery rhymes all the way to one of Beethoven's symphonies.



What makes it hard to find?

■ Upon release, the Miracle Piano held a retail price of £249. This price tag was too much for gamers and an octave too high for budding musicians. As very few hybrid pianist-gamers were willing to make this investment, the revolutionary product from The Software Toolworks got left behind.



Why is it so expensive?

■ With only a handful of gamers making a purchase in 1990, few remain in circulation. This limited number, however, is only half the problem, as the mandatory cables and original packaging are often missing. The majority of these elusive items are firmly lodged in collectors' shrines.

Nintendo ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM™ NES VERSION

The Collector's Guide

THE PAL NES GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN



A Boy And His Blob: Trouble In Blobolonia

- Action In New York
- Addams Family, The
- Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt, The
- Adventures Of Lolo
- Adventures Of Lolo 3
- Adventures Of Rad Gravity, The
- Airwolf
- Aladdin
- Alpha Mission
- Anticipation
- Arch Rivals
- Asterix
- Astyanax
- Athletic World
- Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes
- Aussie Rules Footy
- Balloon Fight
- Banana Prince
- Barker Bill's Trick Shooting
- Batman Returns
- Batman: Return Of The Joker
- Battle Of Olympus, The
- Battletoads
- Battletoads & Double Dragon
- Best Of The Best Championship Karate
- Bionic Commando
- Blaster Master
- Blue Shadow
- Blues Brothers, The
- Boulder Dash
- Boy And His Blob: Trouble In Blobolonia, A
- Bubble Bobble
- California Games
- Capcom's Gold Medal Challenge '92
- Captain America And The Avengers
- Castlevania
- Castlevania II: Simon's Quest
- Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse
- Championship Rally
- Chevaliers Du Zodiaque: La Legende D'Or, Les
- Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers
- Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers 2
- City Connection
- Clu Clu Land
- Cobra Triangle
- Darkman
- Days Of Thunder
- Déjà Vu
- Devil World
- Die Hard
- Digger T Rock: The Legend Of The Lost City
- Donkey Kong
- Donkey Kong 3
- Donkey Kong Classics
- Donkey Kong Jr
- Donkey Kong Jr Math
- Double Dragon
- Double Dragon II
- Double Dragon III
- Double Dribble
- Dr Mario
- Dragon Ball
- Dropzone
- Duck Hunt
- DuckTales
- DuckTales 2
- Dynablaster
- Eliminator Boat Duel
- Elite
- Excitebike
- Faxanadu
- Flintstones: The Surprise At Dinosaur Peak, The
- Galaga
- Galaxy 5000: Racing In The 51st Century
- Gargoyle's Quest II
- Gauntlet II
- Goal! 2
- Golf
- Goonies II, The
- Gradius
- Jack Nicklaus' Major Championship Golf
- Guardian Legend, The
- Guerilla War
- Gumshoe
- Gun.Smoke
- Gyromite
- Hammerin' Harry
- Hogan's Alley
- Home Alone 2: Lost In New York
- Hoops
- Hudson Hawk
- Ice Climber
- Ikari Warriors
- Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade
- Indy Heat



Gauntlet

- Iron Tank
- Isolated Warrior
- Jackie Chan's Action Kung Fu
- Jetsons: Cogswell's Caper, The
- Jimmy Connors Tennis
- Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja
- Jungle Book, The
- Jurassic Park
- Kick Off
- Kid Icarus
- Kirby's Adventure
- Konami Hyper Soccer
- Krusty's Fun House
- Kung Fu
- Legend Of Prince Valiant, The
- Legend Of Zelda, The
- Lemmings
- Lethal Weapon
- Life Force: Salamander
- Little Ninja Brothers
- Little Samson
- Low G Man
- Maniac Mansion
- Marble Madness
- Mario & Yoshi
- Mario Bros
- Mario Is Missing
- Mega Man
- Mega Man 2
- Mega Man 3
- Mega Man 4
- Mega Man 5
- Metal Gear
- Metroid
- Mighty BombJack
- Mighty Final Fight
- Miracle Piano Teaching System, The
- Mission: Impossible
- Mr Gimmick
- NES Open Tournament Golf
- Nigel Mansell's World Championship
- Noah's Ark
- North & South
- Operation Wolf
- Pac-Man
- Panic Restaurant
- Paperboy
- Parasol Stars: Rainbow Islands II
- Parodius
- Phantom Air Mission
- Pinball Quest
- Popeye
- Predator
- Prince Of Persia
- Prisoners Of War
- Probotector
- Probotector II: Return Of The Evil Forces
- Punch-Out!!
- Puzznic
- RC Pro-Am

EXTREMELY RARE Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.
VERY RARE Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.
RARE You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.
UNCOMMON You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.
COMMON Always just a click away for the average collector.
VERY COMMON So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.

- RC Pro-Am II
- Rackets & Rivals
- Rad Racer
- Rainbow Islands
- Rampart
- RoadBlasters
- RoboCop
- RoboCop 2
- RoboCop 3
- Rockin' Kats
- Rodland
- Rollergames
- Roundball
- Schöne Und Das Biest (Beauty & the Beast)
- Schtroumpfs, Les (Smurfs, The)
- Shadow Warriors
- Shadow Warriors II
- Shadowgate
- Shatterhand
- Side Pocket
- Simpsons: Bart vs The Space Mutants, The
- Simpsons: Bart vs The World, The
- Simpsons: Bartman Meets Radioactive Man, The
- Skate Or Die
- Slalom
- Smash TV
- Snake Rattle 'N' Roll
- Snake's Revenge
- Snow Brothers
- Snowboard Challenge
- Solar Jetman: Hunt For The Golden Warship
- Solomon's Key
- Solomon's Key 2
- Solstice: The Quest For The Staff Of Demnos
- Spy vs Spy
- Stack-Up
- Stadium Events
- Star Force
- Star Trek: 25th Anniversary
- Star Wars
- Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back
- StarTropics
- Street Gangs
- Super Mario Bros
- Super Mario Bros & Duck Hunt
- Super Mario Bros & Tetris & Nintendo World Cup
- Super Mario Bros 2
- Super Mario Bros 3



Super Mario Bros


Wizards & Warriors

- Super Turrican
- Swamp Thing
- Swords & Serpents
- Tecmo Cup Football Game
- Tecmo World Cup Soccer
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles II: The Arcade Game
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: Tournament Fighters
- Tennis
- Terminator, The
- Tetris
- Tetris 2
- Time Lord
- Tiny Toon Adventures
- Tiny Toon Adventures Cartoon Workshop
- To The Earth
- Top Gun
- Top Gun: The Second Mission
- Total Recall
- Track & Field II
- Track & Field In Barcelona
- Trog!
- Trojan
- Trolls In Crazyland, The
- Turbo Racing
- Ufouria: The Saga
- Ultimate Air Combat
- Urban Champion
- Volleyball
- Wario's Woods
- Werewolf: The Last Warrior
- Wild Gunman
- Willow
- Wizards & Warriors
- Wizards & Warriors II: Iron Sword
- Wizards & Warriors III
- World Champ
- World Wrestling
- Wrath Of The Black Manta
- Wrecking Crew
- WWF King Of The Ring
- WWF WrestleMania
- WWF WrestleMania Challenge
- WWF WrestleMania: Steel Cage Challenge
- Xevious
- Yoshi's Cookie
- Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link
- Zen: Intergalactic Ninja

Collector Q&A

Keith Lutener is a PAL NES collector and webmaster of NES-Bit (www.nes-bit.com)

Why did you decide to collect for the NES?
Over the years I've had many different retro collections, but through all of them the one system that has held my attention is the NES. It's so easy to pick and play a game. The learning curve for 8-bit games was next to nothing and you can achieve so much in even the shortest time.

And what made you focus on the PAL side?
The UK never really received much in the way of releases and we were lucky to receive close to 300 games for it. There was always the look of envy when I viewed the US catalogue, but after a while I started to really appreciate that not too many of the PAL games were that bad. With a reduced market it seemed to me the poor games just wouldn't sell, so only the good ones tended to come out.

Do you play the games you buy or hoard them?
A mix of both. I'm a natural hoarder and they seem to pile up on the shelves. Besides the odd gaming session I do like to pick a few games to focus on from time to time. *Batman* is one game I picked recently and I'm determined to finish but can never seem to get past the third stage. I can easily lose a weekend loading up some truly terrible games as well, but if I didn't they'd end up coated in dust!

What can you tell us about NES-Bit?
When I first started collecting for the system I spent many hours hoping to find a site that catered for the UK fan. The NES was a smash hit in every country but the UK, so there wasn't much of a presence online. I'd written for a few blogs and NES-Bit seemed a natural step. We've managed to build a great community there with lots of reviews, articles and even some famous developer interviews. We went so far as to produce a community magazine, and the second issue is due out soon. Considering it's just over a year old, we have achieved so much and I'm really proud to have been a part of it.

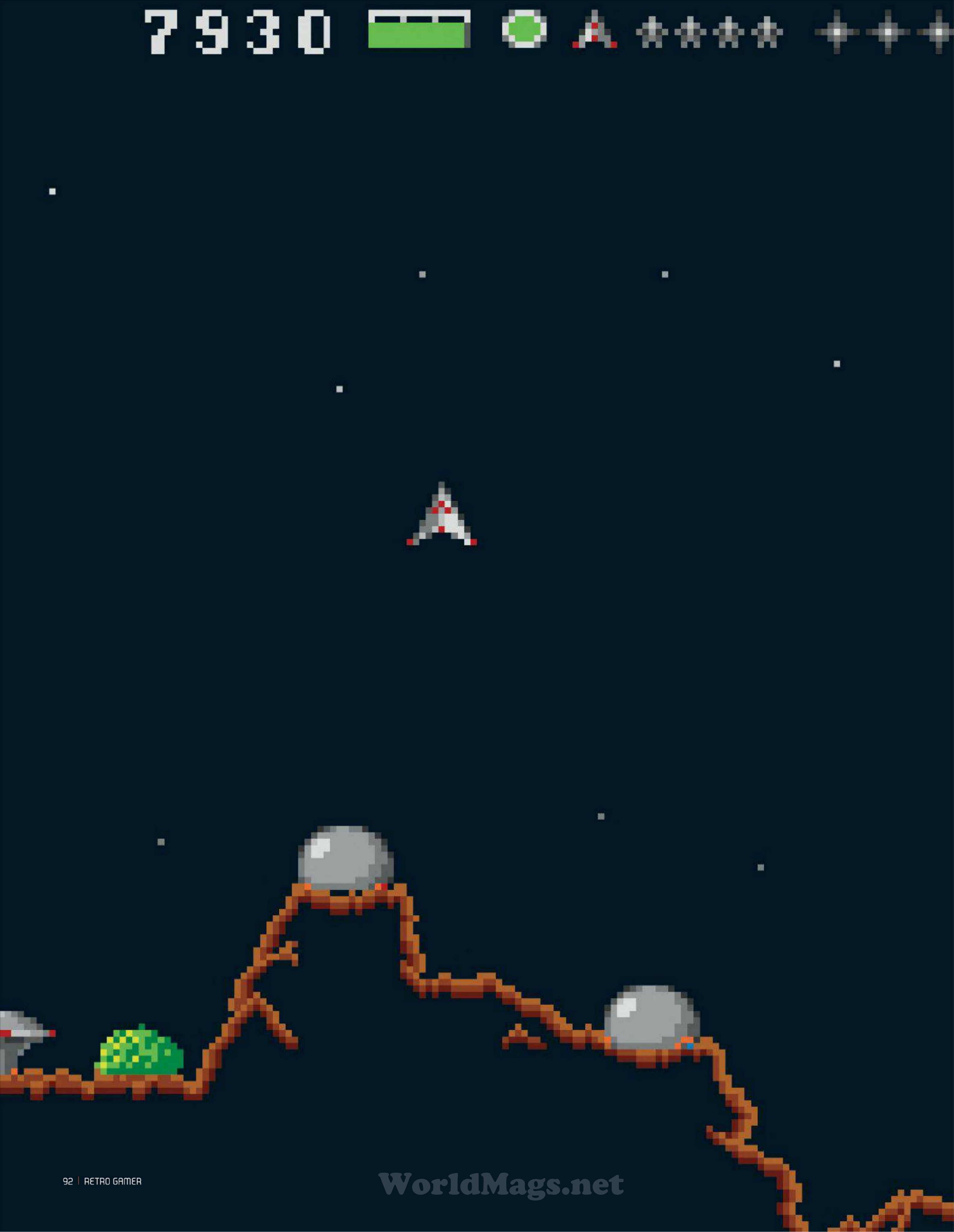
What's the rarest game in your collection?
It would have to be *Anticipation*. In the past three years I've seen it appear a couple of times on eBay if that, yet strangely it never goes for a high amount. I think it ranks as one of the worst games I've ever played, so it was a real disappointment when I finally tracked it down.

What's the most expensive item in your collection?
Cosmic Spacehead by Codemasters. I paid over £60 for a boxed copy with all the inserts. It rarely appears online and was a real crowning achievement for the collection.

What advice would you give to new collectors?
The games are easy to buy en masse, so my advice would be to take it slowly. Pick a few games that you might be interested in then purchase three or four a month. It's far too easy to amass a large collection then find yourself hardly playing anything.






7930

Oids

THE BEST REASON TO BE FRIENDS WITH A GUY CALLED SHERVIN

» RETROREVIVAL

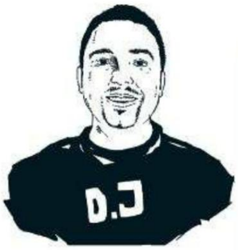


» FTL GAMES
» ATARI ST
» 1987

I was jealous of my school friend Shervin. He had stories of travelling to America. He had loads of role-playing board games, including my all-time favourite *Talisman* (which was converted into a Spectrum game). He had a Nintendo NES with the Zapper and *Duck Hunt*. He was also one of the first in my school year to own an Atari ST. I may have been a Commodore fan, even defending the Amiga in playground 'discussions', but Shervin's ST was my first taste of 16-bit gaming. We spent countless hours on *Dungeon Master* and *Speedball*, but it was *Oids* that always stuck in my memory for being exclusive to the ST.

Oids mixed elements of *Thrust* and *Choplifter* and added a level editor. The player would select a galaxy, the mothership would warp to the planet and the player's shuttle would detach from the mothership. Flying the shuttle through the oddly shaped caverns, prisoners were released from captivity by shooting the bases. The shuttle had to land on flat ground nearby to collect the prisoners, returning to the mothership to progress to the next level. There were many obstacles and enemies out to stop you – from the magnets that repelled or attracted your ship to the vicious clouds of homing missiles that appeared on later levels. And of course gravity was a constant opponent, tempting the rash player into flying too close to the cavern walls. Run out of lives and the game would offer the chance to practise the level, a nice touch.

The kindest thing to say about the graphics and sound is that they do the job – the little prisoners running around have a character of their own, even when burning to the ground thanks to a misplaced bullet or explosion. It is not the flashiest 16-bit game, even with the little 'warping to planet' interlude. But it's the addictive gameplay that really draws the player in, and with the high score for each galaxy saved to disk there was a long-term challenge to beat your friends… *



>> Our main focus this month is PS Vita, which has a surprising number of established franchises on it. We also cast a critical eye over the new Syndicate, and check out Jeff Minter's latest iOS release

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus
It's showing its age now, but I've still been enjoying hacking up ninjas.



STUART
Syndicate
It bears little relation to the original franchise, but it's still been a solid enjoyable shooter.



DAVID
Dariusburst: Second Prologue
It's pricey, but this is a surprisingly good shooter, with great weapons and bosses.

Syndicate

SYNDICATE HACKS INTO THE FPS GENRE, BUT AT WHAT COST?

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £49.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** STARBREEZE STUDIOS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» Released by Bullfrog Productions in 1993, *Syndicate* became a hugely popular strategy title. This was thanks in large part to its sci-fi cyberpunk setting, striking isometric graphics and lashings of violence, resulting in the release of the expansion *American Revolt* in the same year. In 1996 a true sequel, *Syndicate Wars*, was released. This game marks the fourth in the series.



» [360] Had Starbreeze gone down the real-time tactics route, *Syndicate* would have certainly felt more faithful to the original.

✱ GO DEEPER
The facts behind *Syndicate*

>> Both Rosario Dawson and Brian Cox lend their voices to characters in the game.

>> Starbreeze has a good success rate in the FPS genre, having created *The Darkness* and the two *The Chronicles Of Riddick* games.



Though many were vocal in their concern with EA's decision to reboot *Syndicate* as an FPS, if what was delivered was an engrossing game that embraced the grim and violent spirit of the original, we didn't have a problem.

But while Starbreeze has included the thematic ingredients of *Syndicate* in its burnished new body, it has tied them to a game that fails to enthrall and capture the strategic essence of *Syndicate*. The new game takes place in a world that feels linear in design – small rooms, tight corridors, locked doors and loads of identikit enemies to blow away.

Any trace of tactics comes through the DART 6 chip. The source of your agent's superpowers, this bit of tech allows you to see enemies behind cover and bestows faster reactions by slowing down time. He also has a trio of 'breach' abilities that allow him to hack into the brains of enemies and bend them to his will. These include Suicide, which causes them to blow themselves up; Backfire, which causes their weapon to blow up, disarming them; and lastly Persuade, which causes them to jump sides and start shooting up their mates.

Though all the powers sound interesting, once again the linearity of *Syndicate* spoils things. Levels are designed in such a way that rarely do you find yourself relying on any one specific power, and as they all pretty much offer the same effect anyway, their novelty quickly wears thin.



✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SYNDICATE (PC)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION (PS3)





» [360] Dart Vision gives you the edge in battle, turning enemies into eerie orange X-rays that can be seen through cover while slowing down time.

In terms of combat, though, *Syndicate* has a satisfying array of cool weapons to wield, and for the most part, some surprisingly good enemy AI to use them on. It's a stylish corridor shooter, but it lacks the strategy and open feel of the original.

Those wanting a more classic *Syndicate* experience will have to settle for the online co-op campaign – a standalone set of missions with little connection to the main story. These force players to work with a team of up to three other agents, completing objectives in bite-sized levels.

It is in this mode that the mechanics of *Syndicate* work best, and the potential of what could have been starts to show.

OPINION



It has little in common with the original franchise, which is a shame, as you could have so much fun with the series. Having said that, if you accept *Syndicate* for what it is, you'll discover a decent enough shooter that's actually quite a lot of fun to play.

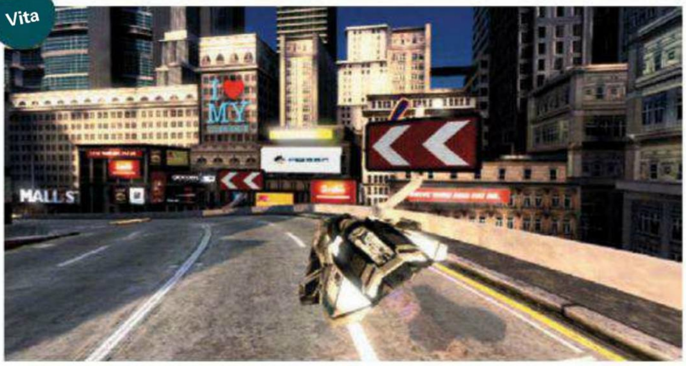
Darran Jones

In a nutshell

Despite its flaws, *Syndicate* is a solid and polished shooter. Co-op is fun, and while single-player isn't so good, it's still entertaining.

>> Score **72%**

Vita







» [Vita] Tracks are far wider than in past games, putting a greater emphasis on combat.

WipEout 2048

BEAUTIFUL ON THE OUTSIDE, SAME OLD GAME ON THE INSIDE

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS VITA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PUBLISHER:** SONY » **DEVELOPER:** STUDIO LIVERPOOL » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

D.J

***WipEout* remains one of the best futuristic racers around, and Studio Liverpool's latest iteration easily cements that position, even if it does little to mess with the core *WipEout* formula.**

Effectively working as a prequel to the previous games, *WipEout 2048* has as much emphasis on rough-and-tumble battles as it does on all-out racing. This, in part, is due to the track designs, which initially are much wider than past games in the series, allowing you to better gauge the distance between enemy ships and marvel at the beautiful visuals that accompany all the on-screen carnage.

It's not long before the difficulty ramps up significantly, though, and once you reach the second of the three available seasons, you'll soon find yourself having to negotiate some truly horrific twisting turns on the later, tighter tracks. Careful use of your air brake is essential to your success, and, as with previous games in the series, you'll really need to learn your way around the tracks in order to reach the coveted top positions.

Structurally, *WipEout 2048* is sound as a proverbial pound, with a neat branching system that gives you plenty of choice as you progress. Even if you hit a difficulty spike in one area, there's usually something else to tackle. And if you do get stuck, the XP system still allows you to make progress, as you'll eventually unlock better vehicles, making the tough races slightly easier.

A similar structure can be found in the online mode, which persuades you to fulfil specific tasks in order to progress. It's also possible to play certain tracks against PS3-based *WipEout HD* players thanks to some snazzy online integration.

While *WipEout 2048* features clever online modes, stunning visuals, a lengthy campaign mode and fast and furious racing, a number of annoying niggles stop it from being the definitive handheld instalment. The most notable is the lengthy loading times, both online and off, that really interrupt *WipEout*'s flow and shouldn't be an issue in these post-UMD days. The lack of innovation also grates, while the touch controls add little to the overall experience. It's still fantastic fun, but it's time for something new.

OPINION

S.H

Though doing nothing new with the 17-year-old franchise, *WipEout 2048* is an eye-catching racer. The progression system and varied races also work well to offer a nice sense of variety. It's just a shame about those frequent loading times.

Stuart Hunt

>> Score **80%**

Ultimate Marvel vs Capcom 3

CAPCOM TAKES YOU FOR A RIDE... AGAIN

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS VITA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS3, XBOX 360 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99 » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

D.J

The first thing that hits you about Capcom's impressive port is just how accurate it is. Virtually identical to the 360 and PS3 versions, it looks brilliant, with fantastic animation and gloriously detailed backdrops that come to life on the Vita's screen.

Gameplay-wise it's also identical, with all the original gameplay modes, including online play, arcade, training and various missions to enjoy. Exclusive to the Vita is 'Touch', which lets you effortlessly pull off specials with a simple touch of the screen. Needless to say, it's for beginners only and feels very gimmicky. Heroes & Heralds, a recent DLC addition, is far more suitable, as it's a game of area domination that is split up into small, bite-sized bouts. It rewards you with cards to alter gameplay mechanics and is ideally suited for dipping in and out of.

It takes a while to get used to switching characters out on the Vita's fewer buttons, but the controls otherwise work well, with only loading times getting in the way of an otherwise slick fighter.

>> Score **77%**

Vita



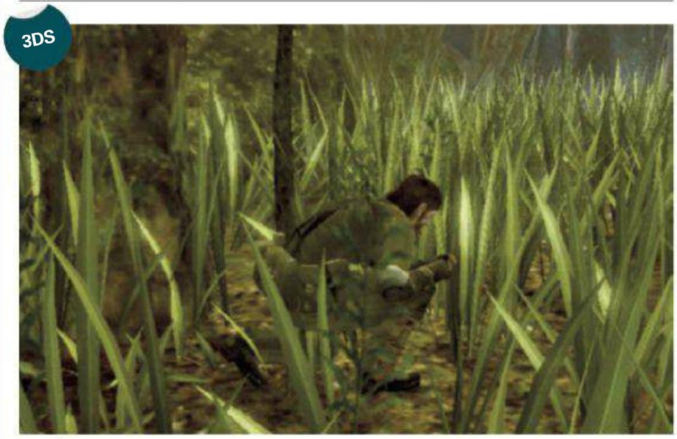


» [Vita] Fans of the PS3 version will be pleased to hear that purchased DLC also works on the Vita.

Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D

KOJIMA PROVES THAT YOU CAN TEACH AN OLD SNAKE NEW TRICKS

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £39.99
» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI » **DEVELOPER:** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS » **PLAYERS:** 1



» [3DS] You can't see it here but the 3D is excellent, giving depth to each individual blade of grass.



After being impressed with BluePoint Games' excellent *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*, we now have another *Metal Gear* game to enjoy. Unlike BluePoint Games' recent release, *Snake Eater 3D* is a proper remake, with Kojima taking advantage of the 3DS' technology to create a truly impressive adaptation of his hit PS2 game.

Graphically, *Snake Eater* looks superb, with stunning jungle locations, great lighting, lush animation and well-crafted cut scenes. Kojima has a superb eye for action, and it shows in *Snake Eater*'s many excellent boss encounters. Dialogue is also decent, and while the cold war story continually treads into nonsense, it now feels like Kojima's tongue is firmly in his cheek.

It's the 3D that most people will be interested in *Snake Eater* for, and they won't be disappointed. It's by far the best use of the medium since the 3DS launched, and looks good during *Snake Eater*'s cinematic cutscenes. It's just as effective ingame as well; giving you a great sense of depth and perspective as you move around *Snake Eater*'s beautifully detailed jungle locations.



There are more than just aesthetic changes to *Snake Eater* though. The touch screen now makes navigating the original clumsy menu screen far easier, while Snake can now move while crouching and aiming. These may sound like small changes, but they effect the gameplay significantly, making it far more accessible than previous versions. Circle Pad Pro support is also included and is a big improvement over the usual 3DS set-up. Whether you've played *Snake Eater* before or not, you're in for a treat.

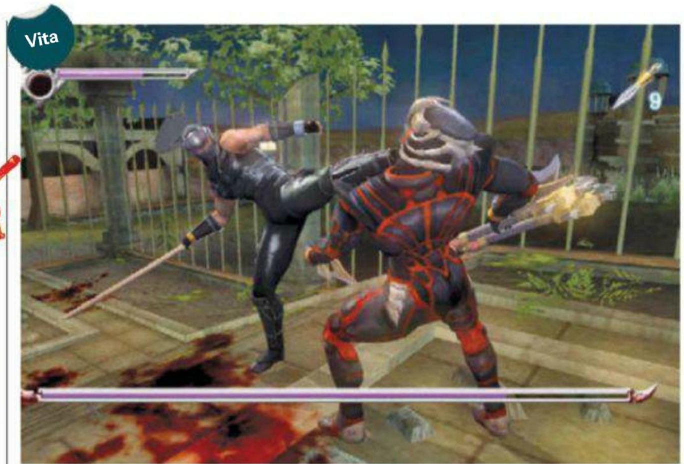
OPINION



It's interesting that *Snake Eater 3D* has been released so close to the *Metal Gear HD Collection*, as they both do different things very well indeed. The new controls make the game easier, but they don't hamper Kojima's remake in anyway. *Snake Eater 3D* is a great update.

Stuart Hunt

>> Score **91%**



» [PS Vita] Bosses remain insanely challenging, unless you remember to block often.

Ninja Gaiden Sigma Plus

FOURTH TIME A CHARM FOR NINJA SLASHFEST?

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS VITA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £34.99 » **PUBLISHER:** TECMO KOEI » **DEVELOPER:** TEAM NINJA » **PLAYERS:** 1



***Ninja Gaiden* is widely regarded as one of the greatest 3D action games of the last generation.** Team Ninja knows this, as it has re-released the game on no less than three different occasions since it made its Xbox debut in 2004.

Sadly, time hasn't been kind to *Ninja Gaiden*, and while the combat does indeed remain exemplary, other aspects are beginning to show their age. Chief among them is the maddening camera angle, which continues to frustrate in the heat of battle. Yes, you can go some way to amend this with the second analogue stick and pressing R, but it's too easy to get stuck in a position that makes it very hard to see what you're doing. The save structure also grates, as it's identical to the original Xbox version. Fine when you're sitting down for lengthy play sessions, not so good when playing a portable device.



Numerous Vita additions have also been made, but they add nothing to the core gameplay experience. Touching the screen allows you to enter first-person mode, and you can then tilt the Vita to look around. You can also fire your bow this way, but the sensitivity makes it hard to land shots with any accuracy. Ninja magic is now activated with manic taps of the back screen, which again does nothing other than annoy. A new mode called Hero has also been included, but this just makes *Sigma Plus* far too easy.

And yet with all its issues, *Ninja Gaiden* remains an enjoyable game, as its combat remains as satisfying as ever. It's just a shame that it hasn't received the same modernisation that *Snake Eater* has.

OPINION



Ninja Gaiden remains an entertaining action game, but it is beginning to look a little behind the times, even with the updated visuals. And the new Vita embellishments add nothing to the overall experience. It's still a good game, but we hoped for much better.

Stuart Hunt

>> Score **78%**



Barbarian: The Death Sword HD

» SYSTEM: iOS **» PRICE:** £2.49 **» PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> Oh, how the mighty have fallen. The original *Barbarian* was a fantastic one-on-one fighter from Palace Software that was as brilliant to play as it was controversial.

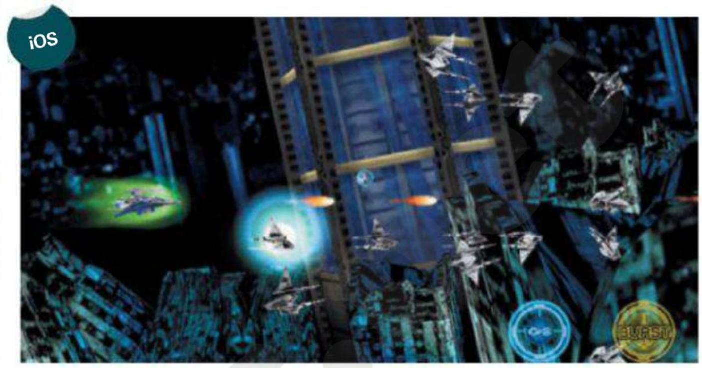
Unfortunately, this iOS reboot from Anuman Interactive ups the controversy factor but forgets to ensure that the gameplay is of a similar standard. The biggest issue with *Barbarian* is its controls, which are clunky, hard to pull off and just aren't suited to iOS.

Graphically it's pretty poor as well, with bland character models and unexciting 3D backdrops, which are as ugly as the head-booting goblin. The cross-platform play between the PC and iOS versions is interesting, and there are some fun challenges, but this is a bland update that does nothing to improve on the 25-year-old original.

>> Score **46%**

Dariusburst: Second Prologue

» SYSTEM: iOS **» PRICE:** £8.49 **» PLAYERS:** 1

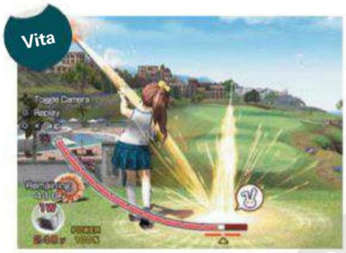


>> *Dariusburst: Second Prologue* is a port of Taito's 2009 PSP game, which received an arcade update in 2010. It also just happens to be one of the best non-Cave shooters we've played on Apple's device.

The primary mechanic in Taito's port is the new burst system. It's a powerful blast of energy that can be unleashed to deal damage to multiple enemies, counter, or create a shield, depending on what ship you select. It's a genuinely interesting system that adds a lot of strategy.

Like previous *Darius* titles, *Dariusburst* features multiple routes, ensuring plenty of replay value. It also benefits from slick touch controls, a stunning soundtrack and challenging bosses. This is a good alternative to the far more expensive PSP original.

>> Score **74%**



Everybody's Golf

» SYSTEM: PS VITA
» PRICE: £34.99 **» PLAYERS:** 1 (1-6 ONLINE)

>> Yes, it's the same old *Everybody's Golf*, but it's one that's been massively refined, and is arguably the definitive version. Packed with courses, a variety of different gameplay modes, and a brand new unlocking system, *Everybody's Golf* features plenty of longevity. It also looks fantastic and has a variety of useful control methods to choose from, solid online play that pits you against every player if you wish and a challenging difficulty curve. There's little new, but there's no denying that it plays a great game of golf.

>> Score **84%**



Rayman Origins

» SYSTEM: PS VITA
» PRICE: £34.99 **» PLAYERS:** 1

>> Michel Ancel's latest *Rayman* game suits the Vita perfectly. It looks absolutely sensational on the tiny screen, being virtually identical to the PS3 version. Gameplay is also the same, with the only omission being its big brother's multiplayer mode, which for some reason has been taken out. A new ghost mode has been included, which acts like a time attack mode, but it's a shame the original wasn't included. Ultimately, *Rayman Origins* is the same great game in portable form, which actually suits it better.

>> Score **86%**

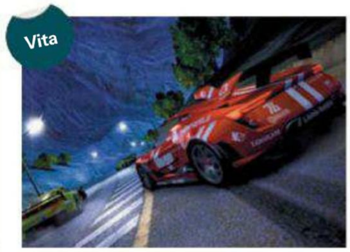


Caverns Of Minos

» SYSTEM: iOS
» PRICE: £1.49 **» PLAYERS:** 1

>> Jeff Minter's new iOS game is full of his trademark stylings and modelled on the old Atari 8-bit game *Caverns Of Mars*. You're required to descend into a series of increasingly complex caverns in search of odd items like biscuits and old spaceships, and return them to your mothership. While simple in theory, it's difficult in practice, as you really need to master the clever thrust mechanics in order to make sufficient progress. It suffers from the odd difficulty spike here and there, but *Caverns Of Minos* is nonetheless a satisfying blaster.

>> Score **82%**



Ridge Racer

» SYSTEM: PS VITA
» PRICE: £19.99 **» PLAYERS:** 1-6

>> This new *Ridge Racer* is a brave one. It opts for a budget price, with additional tracks and cars being purchased as the buyer wants them. While the cars handle brilliantly, there isn't enough variety to hold your interest due to the skeleton structure of what Namco has provided. With gameplay modes being limited to online racing, time attacks and races against the CPU, you'd be better off downloading the PSP original for a fraction of the price, as there's very little here to keep you playing.

>> Score **56%**

RETROROUND-UP

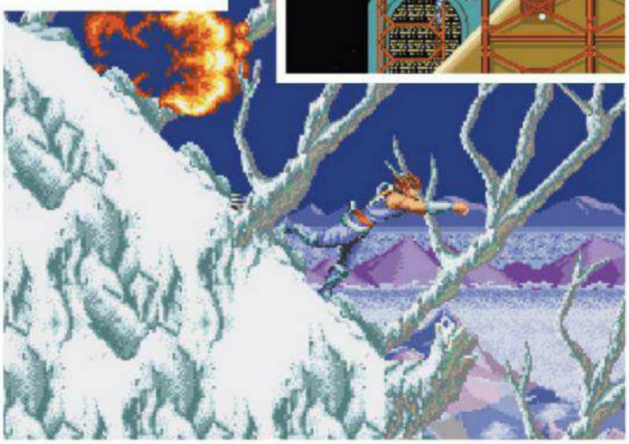


>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers

DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

Strider





INFORMATION
» **System:** Mega Drive
» **Buy it for:** 800 Points
» **Score:** ★★★★★

Sega's conversion of *Strider* was one of the best arcade ports on the Mega Drive, even eclipsing the original game in certain areas. 22 years later, nothing has changed. It's still completely brilliant.

Graphically impressive – although not as accurate as many would have you believe – and featuring a soundtrack that genuinely improves on the arcade original, *Strider* for the Mega Drive is an impressive achievement and a genuinely fantastic platformer to boot.

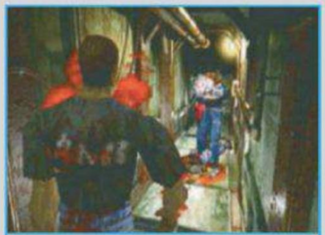
Filled with imaginative level design, outlandish bosses and superb audio, *Strider* sees you cartwheeling through five impressively designed stages that range from Amazonian jungles to the Siberian wilderness, effortlessly dispatching metallic gorillas, huge walkers and anything else that's silly enough to get in your way.

It seems a little strange that Capcom chose to release the Mega Drive version when the Virtual Console supports arcade games, but the port remains an excellent one, easily capturing the elegance and imagination of the original arcade board. We just find it rather amazing that it's taken nearly six years for Capcom and Nintendo to bring this defining game to the Virtual Console. Fortunately, the long wait has certainly been worth it.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Mega Man X
» **System:** SNES
» **Buy it for:** 800 Points
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» Not content with unleashing *Strider*, Capcom has also delivered its first *Mega Man X* game. It's tough as old boots, but this still holds up exceptionally well. The visuals are wonderful, with vibrant colours and gorgeous animation, while the soundtrack perfectly suits the action. It's the tight level design and beautifully paced boss encounters that really make *Mega Man X* shine, though. An excellent release that shows there's still plenty of life in the Virtual Console.



Resident Evil 2
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Buy it for:** £6.99
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» Capcom's best *Resident Evil* game without '4' in the title has been on the US store for an age, so its PAL debut has been long overdue. It's here now, though, and it's glorious, if a little pricey. *Resi 2* helped define the genre back in 1998, and it's still a painfully tense game, with a superb mix of suspense and action. Best of all, this is actually the NTSC US version, meaning we don't have to put up with the sluggish, bordered PAL original.



Jak & Daxter: The Precursor Legacy
» **System:** PlayStation 2
» **Buy it for:** £11.99
» **Score:** ★★★★☆
» Many won't know this, but Naughty Dog's *Jak & Daxter* was the best platformer on the PS2. While it was cool to marvel at the stunning graphics and clever streaming techniques that meant no loading, the game itself was fantastic fun and still holds up today. Like many recent PS2 games, *The Precursor Legacy* has been given an HD makeover and is part of a bigger trilogy at retail. It's not cheap, but still great fun.



God Hand
» **System:** PlayStation 2
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» Clover Studio was one of the bravest developers around, churning out amazingly imaginative games that we still pine for today. *God Hand* is one such game, and while nothing has been done to it in terms of upgrades, it's so great that it really doesn't matter. Capcom's wacky fighter is filled with charm, character, and some of the most dynamic fighting around. Download it, love it, then tell your friends about it so they can do the same.

▼ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Although we're starting to see some big hitters, both the 3DS and Wii versions of Nintendo's service are featuring few new games.

Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3
» **System:** Game Boy Color
» **Buy it for:** £3.60
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Kirby's Block Ball
» **System:** Game Boy
» **Buy it for:** £2.70
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Blaster Master: Enemy Below
» **System:** Game Boy Color
» **Buy it for:** £4.50
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

The Ignition Factor
» **System:** SNES
» **Buy it for:** 800 Points
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Brawl Brothers
» **System:** SNES
» **Buy it for:** 800 Points
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆



▼ PSN

Sony continues to impress us with the addition of PS2 classics. Yes, there's some dreck on there, but the goodness will come.

Resident Evil 3: Nemesis
» **System:** PSone
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Need For Speed: Most Wanted
» **System:** PS2
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

Sonic Heroes
» **System:** PS2
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Steel Dragon EX
» **System:** PS2
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution
» **System:** PS2
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Score:** ★★★★★



▼ PC SERVICES

More publishers continue to support GOG, with Eidos being the latest company to release a bunch of digital titles.

Thief Gold
» **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.29)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Thief II: The Metal Age
» **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.29)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

The 7th Guest
» **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.29)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Hitman 2: Silent Assassin
» **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.29)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Soulbringer
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.77)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆



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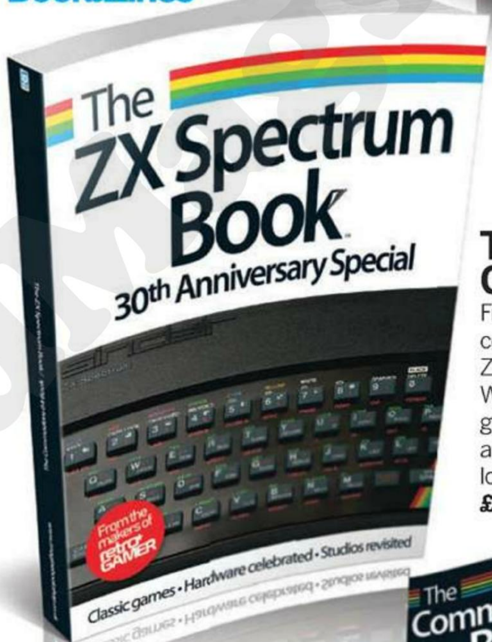
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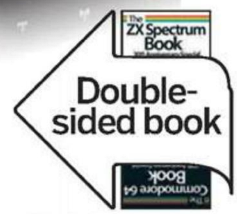
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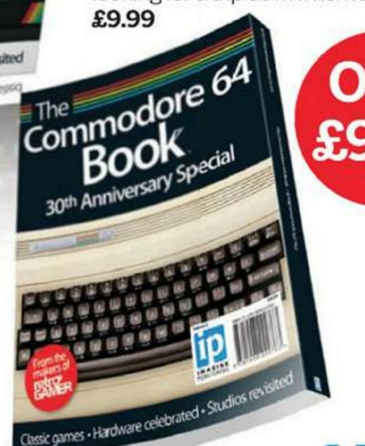
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HOMEBREW

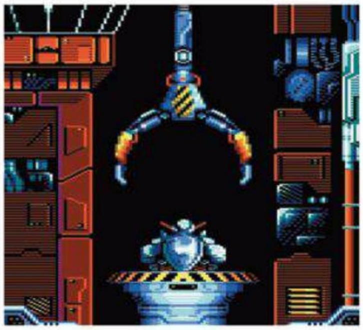
>> The scene's latest news and reviews



Blimey, where did you lot spring from already? I'm still recovering from getting RG Rampage written in time for issue 100! Hopefully, rather than aiming a string of obscenities in my general direction, the readers who spent a quiet evening or two typing that listing into their C64s felt a warm wave of nostalgia for the days when we all typed in games on a regular basis

R-TYPE

BLAST OFF AND STRIKE THE EVIL BYDO EMPIRE!



» [C64] Don't go walking slow on your own…



» [Amstrad CPC] And delivers me to a destiny.

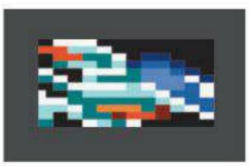
Ah, the evil Bydo Empire. All they seem to have been doing for the last quarter of a century is throwing extensive resources into attacking humanity, only to get their bottoms soundly kicked by a lone R-9A Arrowhead fighter. As before, this new Amstrad CPC implementation of the coin-op classic sees the craft starting out with just a pea-shooter of a gun and, as the first level progresses, gaining handy power-ups from destroyed enemies that bolt on lasers, homing missiles and, most importantly to the *R-Type* series, the Force. It's an indestructible weapon pod that can be used as a combination of a shield and a battering ram, either attached to the R-9A itself or drifting around the battlefield.

As with *BB4CPC*, which we looked at last issue, this is a second bite of the conversion cherry; the original Electric Dreams release of *R-Type* was ported Spectrum code, hurriedly crammed into the CPC without being fully optimised because there wasn't time and receiving only a lukewarm reception from both reviewers and gamers. This new iteration from developer Easter Egg, however, has, after the considerable effort put in and indeed the campaign of teaser videos and previews, already been hailed by some in the Amstrad community as the new benchmark for CPC games generally, or at the very least the primary candidate for game of the year 2012. It's certainly impressive, sporting newly created CPC mode 0 graphics that replace the converted Spectrum ones, a sparkly new soundtrack where there had been just sparse effects previously, and some excellent presentation.

And after all those refinements, we wanted to absolutely adore it because, well, it's a good-looking rendition of Irem's seminal shoot-'em-up for the Amstrad CPC, which has very obviously been a labour of love for the developers. But regardless of its beauty, it can be difficult to love something that wants to be so cruel to you unless you enjoy being abused, and the difficulty curve has been made significantly steeper than the coin-op or, indeed, the otherwise weaker Electric Dreams port. Enemies are more aggressive to the point where the ring of guns on the first level starts taking pot shots at the ship before it's even moved into their space, and the size of the play area means that dodging the snake at the end of the second level takes a few tries to find the safe spots. There's also a knack to swapping the Force from front to back, which can be particularly tricky in those spaces that are now even more confined.

And, sadly, there are also issues with crashing in the version we've been playing, so the overall score *R-Type* receives has to reflect that; the developers have already been made aware of the issue and are promising an update, and we'll revise the score accordingly when that appears, so keep an eye on these pages. For the moment, it is still worth downloading to marvel at the work Easter Egg has put in while waiting for the service pack.

82%



» **FORMAT:** AMSTRAD CPC
» **DEVELOPED BY:** EASTER EGG
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/R-TYPE-CPC
» **PRICE:** FREE
» **REVIEWED BY:** JASON KELK



» [Amstrad CPC] You could at least have tidied up.



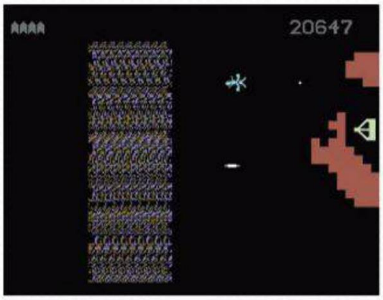
» [Amstrad CPC] Woah, it's a snake!

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

JARS' REVENGE

FORMAT: C64 » **DEVELOPER:** TRISTAR AND RED SECTOR INC » **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/JARS-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE



» [C64] Revenge is a dish best served cold. With lasers.

No, the name isn't particularly subtle and this is indeed a C64 clone of Atari 2600 classic *Yars' Revenge*. All of the elements are there, the heroic insect being chased by an enemy torpedo and the Swirl while nibbling away at the shield around the evil Quotile in order to get a shot in with its powerful Zorlon cannon.

There have been a few conversions of *Yars'* over the years, including the rather weak *Yars' Return* for the C64 back in 2002, but TRSI's version of the original is one of the best we've played on any 8-bit. The graphics have been beefed up but not to excessive levels, sound is also ramped up for the SID but not too far, and the gameplay is pretty much spot-on.

Although it's a relatively simple game at heart – destroy shield, kill Quotile, rinse and repeat – *Jars' Revenge* is still remarkably addictive and well worth downloading.

88%

ENDLESS FORMS MOST BEAUTIFUL

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** DAVE HUGHES
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/EFMB » **PRICE:** FREE

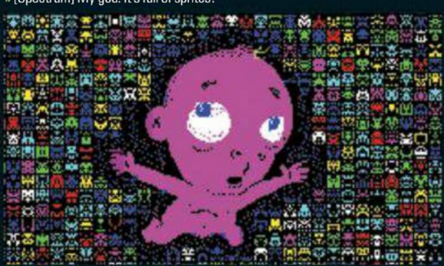
Moebius, the star of previous Dave Hughes games *Stamp Quest* and *Wunderchar$*, is back with a friend called Pucky for another collecting adventure, and this time they need the player's help to gather sprites. Collectors take what they do very seriously, so our heroes want to work their way through the various colour-coded grades to the ultimate level of rainbow.

But it's never as easy as just picking up objects. There are enemies patrolling the levels, occasional bombs that count down and then explode, and the dreaded Attribute Snake weaving its way down the platforms from time to time – but at least there's a nice cup of tea with a biscuit to pick up that offers temporary invulnerability.

EFMB looks similar to *Stamp Quest* but with everything turned up a notch; there's more colour, smoother movement and serious numbers of levels since they're randomly generated. Unlike *Stamp Quest*, the difficulty curve is quite gentle, so now less masochistic gamers can enjoy the collecting experience.

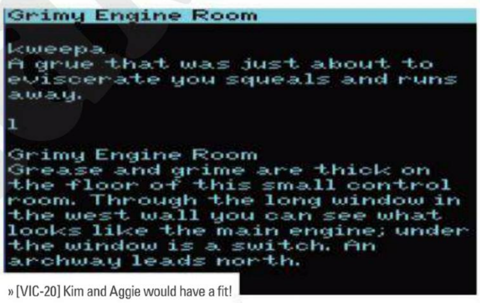
84%

» [Spectrum] My god. It's full of sprites!





» [VIC-20] Press the magic button, Brian.



» [VIC-20] Kim and Aggie would have a fit!

COMETFALL

» **FORMAT:** EXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** STEVE 'KWEEPA' MCCREA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/COMETFALL-VIC » **PRICE:** FREE

***Cometfall* is a** text adventure for the expanded VIC-20, written in the style of Infocom titles such as *Starcross*. The game starts with the player's escape pod smashing itself to pieces against a comet, which, rather than just being an airless chunk of rock, has some kind of abandoned base within it and a protective dome to maintain an atmosphere.

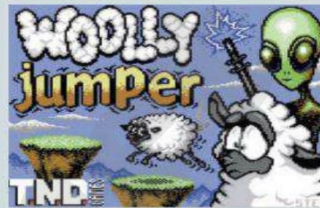
Speaking of atmosphere, the author has managed to cram quite a bit in. The location descriptions are good and most of the puzzles are tricky little devils, so players should expect to spend some playing time scratching their heads and randomly trying to insert objects into the concave device to see what comes out.

Decent homebrew text adventures are relatively rare because it takes both programming and writing skill to produce one. *Cometfall* has a few technical hiccups but is well written in both senses.

89%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [C64] Feeling a little sheepish.

>> Bleating the high score

The original version of *Woolly Jumper*, a scrolling platformer starring an armed sheep, was one of the entries into RGCD's C64 16K cartridge competition at the end of 2011, and we were going to review it this issue… until a 64K version popped up at the last minute that adds another eight levels! Pootle over to **kikstart.eu/baa-c64** for now and there will be a review of this bigger bleating beastie soon.



» [Amiga] Bean there, done that!

>> Happy hacky sacks

It's been in development for quite a long time now, but the impressive-looking *Mr Beanbag* for the Amiga is finally available. Take control of the loveable… uh, beanbag on a mission to save his friend. The game requires an AGA Amiga to run and is a little buggy, but there aren't any plans on the developer's part to fix anything after this release. It is still playable despite that, however. **kikstart.eu/beanbag-amiga**



» [C64] More metal mayhem.

>> Let's rawk!

And finally, it's not a new game, but we're going to mention it because the entire series is always worth a look. The C64 run-and-gun *Metal Warrior 4* has been given an overhaul, which tweaks the difficulty level a little based on the newer Game Boy Advance version, adds some improved in-game graphics and bolts in a new loader that supports IDE64 hard disk interfaces. Hit up **kikstart.eu/mw4-c64** for a download.

HOMEBREW

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

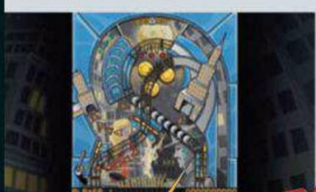
>> Pipped to the post

We enjoyed the slightly bizarre platformer *Apple Jack* when we played it originally, and were therefore pleased when developer My Owl Software emailed us about a sequel. As with the first game, the player's apple-headed avatar must smite evil pandas, flying eyeballs, washing machines and other strange things on their way through the stages, and there are huge bosses to encounter as well. *Apple Jack 2* boasts over 60 levels and is due to be released on the 360 and PC during 2012.



>> From Soho down to Brighton

Hardboiled Pinball is, as the name suggests, a pinball game, and the 'hardboiled' part of the title is down to the Thirties gangster styling. We've given it a quick play and the feel is similar to the earlier Digital Illusions games on the Amiga, *Pinball Dreams* and *Pinball Fantasies*, so fairly uncluttered tables and lots of fast-paced ball bearing action await. **kikstart.eu/hardboiled-pinball** takes you to the XBLIG shop.



FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Journey In The Jungle**.

Captain McCallery explores strange new worlds, seeks out new life and new civilisations, then finds himself in mortal danger from the natives. Take control of the good captain and lead him through the various jungles and caves, collecting ammunition for his gun and brightly coloured fruit along the way. **kikstart.eu/journey-jungle**

XBOX LIVE INDIE GAMES ROUND-UP





SKIMMER PATROL



» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SKIMMER-PATROL

The most powerful narcotic known to man in the future will be the Black Shade mushroom, growing abundantly in the dangerous fog swamps and prized by drug lords and their minions. The only safe way to patrol the area is with a Skimmer, chasing down rogue pilots making a run for it with their illicit cargos and destroying crops of Black Shade wherever possible.

Skimmer Patrol looks and to a degree plays just like Mervyn Estcourt's Spectrum classic *Deathchase*, and that would be a good thing if it weren't for the poor implementation. The refresh speed is embarrassingly low and the controls uncomfortably sluggish for what should be a fast-paced action game. It's probably best avoided, because the 8-bit version is significantly more playable.



OCEAN DRIVE CHALLENGE



» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/OCEAN-DRIVE

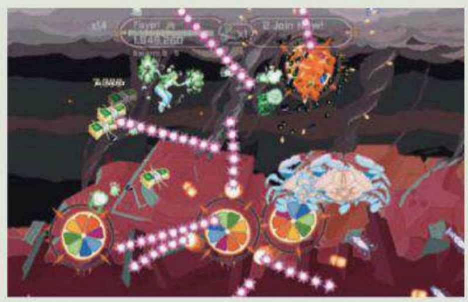
Ocean Drive Challenge is a road race based on the original *OutRun*, with shiny, high-performance cars blasting along the stretches of highway between checkpoints, avoiding other competitors, general road users and roadside objects along the way.

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but the original *OutRun* coin-op was very much a product of its hardware, and aping that 2D-as-3D look with the Xbox 360 really doesn't do Microsoft's machine justice. The cardboard cut-out appearance of scenery and traffic just looks odd.

The game itself is okay, but the controls aren't particularly responsive and there are better driving games



available from the Xbox Live Indie Games service for around the same price. So, unless you specifically want an *OutRun* clone, it's worth shopping around.



GAME TYPE

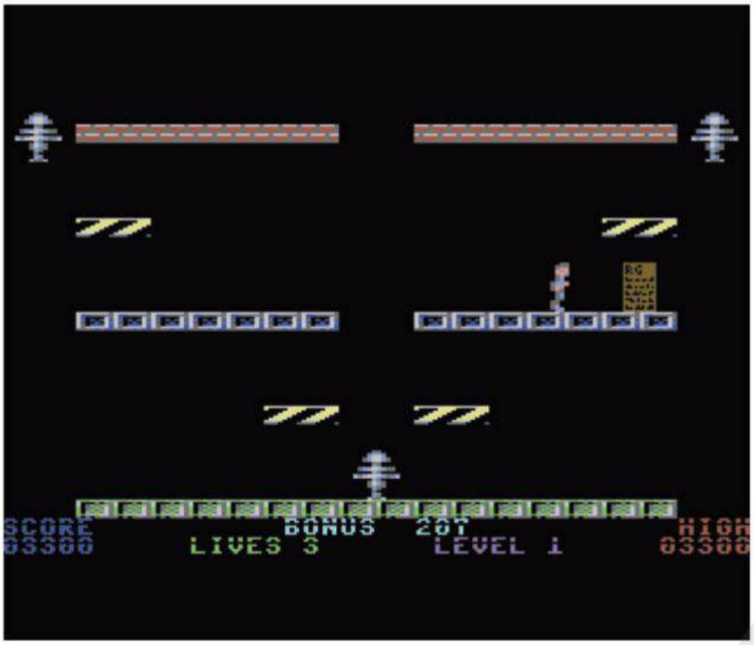


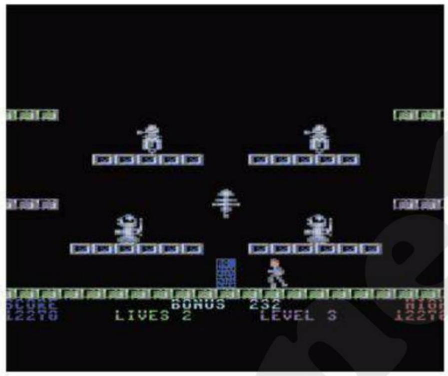
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/GAME-TYPE

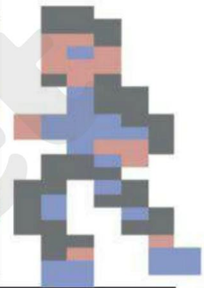
Buried deep within the menus of the MediaBall games console is the fabled Game Type option, and Hoodie Girl, who has become the option's unofficial mascot, must pit herself against the evil console manufacturer to get the option moved to somewhere more prominent. That battle is a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up where our heroine must kill or be killed.

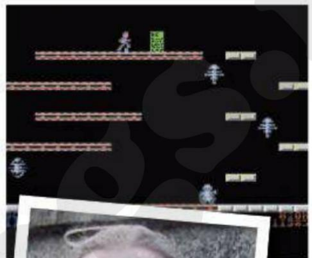
Hoodie is armed with a weedy-looking slap shot, which throws hand-shaped bullets in three directions, as well as the more impressive kick beam and an attack that can temporarily slow down time. The latter two weapons both drain her weapon power, but that can be recharged by collecting cash dropped by destroyed enemies.

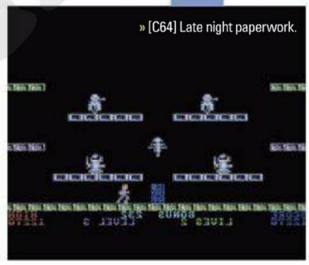
Game Type was developed by Mommy's Best Games, responsible for blasters such as *Shoot 1UP* and *Explosionade*. That pedigree shows through so, although this is a parody of the 360 Dashboard update that buried the Indie channel, it's still a solid and challenging shoot-'em-up. There might not be much length, but completing each loop makes things more challenging, and the longevity comes from racking up the biggest score.






» [C64] The perils of magazine editorship!




» [C64] Late night paperwork.



THE DIARY OF RG RAMPAGE

Issue 100 featured the type-in listing RG Rampage on the C64, so rather than a making of, we've just taken Jason Kelk's change log entries from the source code, translated from 'coder' into English and removed the expletives!

27 December 2011
After a false start, which proved too memory-hungry, I've settled on a platform game for the type-in listing. The first step is taking my base engine and strapping things in like jumping and test graphics at the right points in memory before altering my stock background collision detection to test a wider area and read below the player sprite.

28 December 2011
Sprite-to-sprite collisions were turned on, so touching an enemy triggers an event – the game halts and flashes the border for now – and the collectable item can be picked up, causing it to respawn somewhere else, as defined by the level data.

29 December 2011
I've drawn some character bricks and, along with adding a routine to grab and mangle the C64's ROM characters, replaced the test graphics. The background draw code is fed five bytes per platform, specifying X and Y start position, length, which character pair to use and their colour. Four of the new characters were moving conveyors, so programming was needed to shift both the belts and the sprite while stood on them.

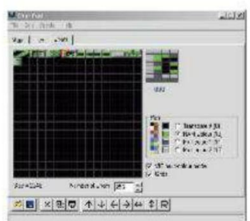
6 January 2012
After surviving the new year, it's back to work and another successful day spent drawing sprites. To keep the size down, only the left-facing frames were included and sprite-flipping code was written to turn them around at start-up.

7 January 2012
The routines that deal with game over and level and game completion were sorted out, along with most of the status bar routines and a couple of tweaks to the collisions because they were proving too sensitive.

8 January 2012
The titles page was the last piece of cosmetic code to produce, and that went in today, with everything appearing to work together cleanly. I threw a few hours into optimising the code and fixing a glaring bug in the collisions where the first enemy wouldn't kill the player; this was down to the original base code where that sprite is usually assigned as a player bullet.

A shiny new sound effect generator was written from scratch and some noises assigned to events within the game. *RG Rampage*'s code is now complete… barring bugs, cosmetic details and level data!


» [C64] Jason's desktop, showing the game and the source code.


» [C64] In-game tiles – not too many of them either!

9 January 2012
Started designing the levels and installing them into the game. This is done without editors so takes a little time and is where minor bugs that have remained concealed will rear up. I had the idea of extending the play area into the upper border while out walking the dog, so that went in too.

10 January 2012
More building, typing and testing – six levels at around 120 bytes each doesn't sound like much, but making sure they actually work as intended takes time. The job of writing a Windows-based program to generate the final BASIC listing was also handled today. It was never meant for public consumption and that shows, but it does the job and the listing is then copied and pasted into WinVICE for final testing.

11 January 2012
The day of reckoning! I made a few minor cosmetic changes and optimisations before firing up the code generator to create the final BASIC listing to email to Darran.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

BREAKING TRADITION

Dear Retro Gamer,

I've been reading a lot of posts lately on digital gaming being the future. Is anyone else dead set against this or is it just me? I admit that there is a convenience to buying games digitally, and the ability to obtain it quickly (broadband speed allowing this) is useful, but the prices make me worried.

Many popular releases on Xbox or PS3 are often the same price as RRP, meaning I'm saving no money at all. Then of course there's the fact that I won't be able to sell on the copy if I don't like it. I've been watching the PS Vita launch closely, as the crazy PSN prices for PSP Go were very disheartening. I had to often pay over the recommended retail price for a game, because I simply couldn't buy it elsewhere. So far, the Vita appears to be a good £5 cheaper than RRPs, but it still feels too high. Surely £20 would be the sweet spot.

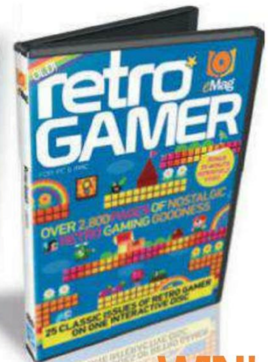
Steam shows that sensible pricing can be achieved, but I'm concerned that companies will get greedy and we will all end up paying through the nose if console companies push for a digital only future.

By far the biggest issue though is not having any actual games to cherish. I'm a hoarder by nature and love the idea of a shelf heaving with classic software. My concern is that in two generations time we'll all have nothing but very full hard drives and very little else.

James Newman

Sure there are cracking titles available on Xbox Live, PSN and similar services, but the questionable prices of new games gives us concern. Just like you, we're traditionalist. The days when we have empty shelves is one we're certainly not looking forward to. Cheer yourself up with an eMag.





WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

TWO FOR ONE

Dear Retro Gamer,

Just wanted to say that I've just received issue 100 and am blown away by the free gift. I've never owned issue 1 before, and I've been dying to see it, but high eBay prices have always stopped me from buying it. After 8 long years of waiting I am no longer disappointed, because I've finally read it.

It's certainly a little rough around the edges, but it remains full of the charm and character that can also be found in current issues of the magazine. I wasted an idea day and read it cover to cover. Many thanks for giving us such a superb gift.

Thomas James

We're glad that you liked the issue 1 reprint Thomas. It certainly wasn't easy getting two magazines prepared under the normal deadlines, but judging by the response from everyone, the hard work was definitely worth it.



» Thomas James was quite happy with issue 100. Based on the numerous tweets and emails we've had, so are many more of you.



» [NEO GEO] If you like Japanese coverage you'll be glad to see plenty more games in later issues.

EASTERN PROMISE

Dear Retro Gamer,

As a subscriber for several years now, I have been very happy over the last several months to be seeing more conversations with Japanese developers included in the magazine. Being a fan of both Western and Eastern game series, interviews with Japanese developers have been the one area under-served by the magazine. As much as I enjoy reading about classic games from the perspective of those who wrote various conversions, I always find discussions with the original developers to be the most interesting and revealing. I realise that there is a language gap with regards to interviewing Japanese developers, as well as an apparent aversion to discussing their older works (which I do not understand). I am glad to see that **Retro Gamer** is making strides to overcome these hurdles. Thanks for the excellent articles on *Final Fantasy VII, Dragon Quest* and *Metal Slug* and thanks to the developers for sharing their experiences with us. Here's to another 100 issues!

Jason Williams
Kentucky, USA

Getting Japanese developers to open up can be very difficult Jason, but we'll keep pushing forward and try to get brand new exclusive interviews. You may have noticed that *Lucky & Wild* appears in the current issue, and we'll have *Super Mario RPG* in issue 102. It's certainly not



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



YOUTUBE UPDATE

WE'RE TAKING A short break with the videos, but don't worry they'll soon be back. And there's still plenty of great vids to browse through. See them all at **http://www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz** or just google RetroGamerDaz to hunt them down and have a retro video session.

easy task, mainly due to the barriers that you have mentioned, but we're certainly making progress.

DEMO PROTEST

Hi guys,

I really enjoyed reading your Covertape Wars feature in issue 97, and it got me really hankering for a similar feature about PS1 demo discs. The main difference to the article would be that there weren't really any "demo disc wars", as the *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* pretty much had a monopoly on it (the short-lived *STATION* magazine was no competitor, seeing as it had nowhere near the amount of demos and any it did have had already featured in *OPM* months earlier). It would also be nice to reminisce over the incredible Net Yaroze games given away on the disc. So, any chance of a feature?

Keep up the great work, and happy 100 issues! Thanks,

Daniel Hinchcliffe, Bristol

We're not too sure about the PlayStation demos, but an in-depth article on Net Yaroze is a distinct possibility. We will see what we can sort out for a future issue.

AMSTRAD HEAVEN

Dear Retro Gamer,

My issue 99 just arrived in the post this morning, and firstly I loved the feature on the top 25 Amstrad games! My first ever computer was the Amstrad CPC 464 Plus, and I adored it. In fact, I still do!! Being so young when I had it, I found it difficult to understand what to appreciate in a game, so I would buy games that looked as though they would appeal to me (insert the never judge a book quote here) however it was great to see that I own around half of the top 25 games on your list, as it's quite rare that any game I have from this era is covered. My main point though is that I was delighted to see the star letter from Martyn Hicks. I had no idea that some readers had an issue with PS2/DC/GC games being covered. I would like to back up Martyn's point that I grew up in my teen years with an N64 and then GameCube, and I love them to bits. I still play them both to this day! If anything I would love to see MORE coverage of them! (Especially the N64!) It is **Retro Gamer**, and I would class something as retro in the gaming world if it is no longer freely available to buy e.g. it is out of production. A magazine like this one needs a broad appeal to a variety of readers to ensure its longevity, and diversity amongst the systems covered is the only way to achieve this.

Graeme Robb, Renfrew

We're glad you enjoyed the Amstrad list Graeme. Forum members chose it, and while we didn't agree with all the choices, it still gave a good representation of the machine. Glad to hear you're a fan of Future Classic as well. We may well start doing making of GameCube, Xbox and PS2 games in the future. We'll see how it goes.

MORE APPLE LOVE PLEASE

Dear Retro Gamer,

After seeing the wonderful Apple II special you did a while back and cheering loudly in public at the prospect of further Apple coverage, I must say I am somewhat

> " I would class something as retro if is no longer freely available to buy "

RETROBATE PROFILE



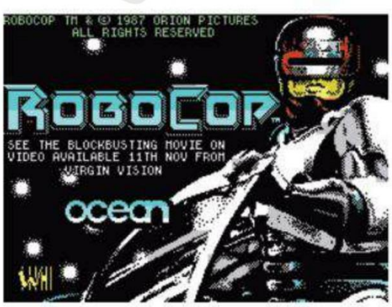
Name:	Gary Reynolds
Joined:	13 October 2011
Location:	England, Nottingham
Occupation:	Warehouse operative
Website:	not given
Fave Games System:	Sega Mega Drive



» [Amstrad] The Top 25 Amstrad Games feature went down really well. But why wouldn't it? The Amstrad was an awesome home computer.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



ROBOCOP SPECTRUM

To tie in with this month's massive Ocean feature we've found ourselves playing the rather excellent *RoboCop* on the ZX Spectrum. Just be warned, it's not an easy game…



High Score: 25, 230



High Score: 17,030



DARRAN'S ROBOCOP TIPS

Be on the look out for crossfire from enemies. There are certain parts of each stage which will totally butcher your health if you're not careful. Be sure to take out any window snipers as soon as they appear as well.



STUART'S ROBOCOP TIPS

It's a good idea to preserve ammo by letting single street thugs to get up close and smashing them with your fists. *RoboCop* isn't the quickest of game characters so timing your attack can be tricky. Once you get the hang of it though, punching pays dividends.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite BBC Micro game?

Roo I wasn't even born when it came out, but *Repton* is the only game on the Micro that makes we want to go back to the time.

jdanddiet Well I remember playing one game loads, I even thought it better than the Speccy version - so it has to be *Chuckie Egg*!

markopoloman It's a game that I don't have a clue what the name is. Used to play it at school. It was a top-down shooter in space. Your ship looked like the Liberator out of *Blake's 7* and it had a radar screen. The ship was always in the middle of the screen and the star field moved around you… I loved it!

Wil That sounds like Acornsoft's *Starship Command*. It was written by one of the guys who went on to do *Exile*. Speaking of which, it's got to be a toss-up between that and *Elite*. I'll say *Elite*. A safe and predictable answer but there you go.

Sel Feena Imogen, without a doubt! *Chuckie Egg*'s a very close second.

ipmarks *Elite* 100%…

This is a game, which caused me so much jealousy when it came out on the BBC and I had a Spectrum. The wait for a conversion was almost unbearable to my childhood self… and when it did come it was good, but not as good as BBC Elite.

Sokurah I never had a BBC myself but one of my best friends did, and the game I liked playing the most over there was Elite. Sure, eventually it came out on the Spectrum too - and while it was a good conversion it just wasn't as fluid as the original.

Jagfest_UK Hard one! In my earlier years I played on the BBC nearly as much as my Spectrum because both my school and neighbour had them. I think the game I used to play the most strangely was some obscure game called *Tower Bridge* but thinking back my favourite game for the machine was a game called *Kix*, a fine clone of Taito's arcade game *Qix*.

VinnyM My cousin had a good old BBC B micro and I used to love playing *Dare Devil Dennis* by Simon Pick. Great little graphics and a lot of fun to play.

Trickytoon *Citadel* - the perfect game for me at the time, just as I was getting into the fantasy genre. It felt as expansive then as *Skyrim* does now (I had a good imagination to fill in the blanks!) and I never got sick of completing it.

DigitalDuck I'll take the safe bet of *Elite* too. One of my favourite games, and not only did the Model B version have all the features that weren't on the other computers, but it just felt like it fit the Micro so well.

mlucifersam Didn't use one much back in the day but I was jealous that Frak wasn't available on my Spectrum.

TheDude18 Not the biggest BBC fan but I thought *Revs* was the bee's knees.

Rinoa My favourite is probably *The Krystal Connection*, although it wasn't released until 2009. Such a fun platform game though, and it always attracts a lot of interest at the retro gaming events. Another favourite is *Chuckie Egg*. Who couldn't love that game?

TMR I'll go for *Fire Track* because it's a lovely vertically scrolling shoot-'em-up that pushes the hardware pretty hard.

felgekarp It's easily *Citadel*, no wait, *Castle Quest*, no, *Imogen*, no, *Boffin*. Gah!!!

psj3809 One of my friends had a Beeb, wasn't jealous by most of the games I saw but the one which stood out was *Sim*, you had a jetpac and basically had to go through lots of different screens getting objects to get past doors etc, was great for its time

r0jaws My absolute favourite is *Repton: the Lost Realms* from Retro Software. I bought a copy at Replay on 5 1/4" disc and play it on my BBC Master quite a bit. It's a cracking puzzler, and it got loads of attention at GEEK2012.

fgasking To be different, *Killer Gorilla*! First BBC micro game I played at school and many fond memories. However there may be a "smidge" of rose-tinted nostalgia with my choice

baada Out of sheer genius and depth, I'd have to plump for *EXILE*, a brilliant arcade adventure from 1988.

RetroMartin None, because I've never played on one *runs*

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

JAGUAR GAMES

Lettuce After getting a Jaguar last week with *Cybermorph*, *AVP* and *DOOM* what are the other must-have games?

killbot The Jag version of *Rayman* is really good if you don't have it on one of the other billion formats it's available on. I've never played it, but I've heard a lot of people really like *Defender 2000*.

HalcyonDaze00 *Tempest* is the best of a bad bunch

JagfestUK One of the best racers on any console of its generation it has some amazing fast gameplay, great graphics, stunning music and even a 2-player mode!

DreamcastRIP It bemuses me how some folk love to slate the Jaguar controller but seem to go quiet when it comes to highlighting the gamepad abominations that came as standard with certain other consoles.

BUYING STRATEGIES

jcdentont1000 Are you a 'buy everything, ask later' type of collector, or do you methodically hunt down your prey, stalking eBay listings like the proverbial large… stalking… thing?

theantmeister 1. Go to eBay. 2. Search for a system (say NTSC SNES games). 3. Hit "sort by ending soonest". 4. Buy the cheapest game that isn't a sports title. 5. Repeat for different systems until I run out of room.

Liamh1982 Is it cheap? Do I already own it? Do I have something to play it on? Strategies are for sports coaches and military commanders, not me!

Matt_B My strategy for a while has been that I can only buy a new game when I finish two old ones.

speedlolita I buy stuff that I actually want. And I only buy the items if they're in mint condition.

JET SET RADIO

DreamcastRIP The game's coming to PSN and XBLA. Here's hoping it's an all-new game although a tarted up HD re-release with online features would still make me happy.

Zaply I will have me some of that. Loved this game, if I could only clear my garage out to find the DC version.

tachi Great game but I really am rubbish at it! Well up for a PSN version though!

nakamura I hope it contains all the content from the DC version. If it does, it will be my first XLBA purchase.

stvd OH NO! *JSRF* is great but the dumbed-down spray painting removes a lot from the original.

RetroMartin Didn't enjoy the remixes in *JSRF* hence my love for *JSR* more…cracking game, one of the first Dreamcast titles I played!

OLD vs NEW

We find out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Metal Gear Solid* game is best?

Metal Gear



Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D



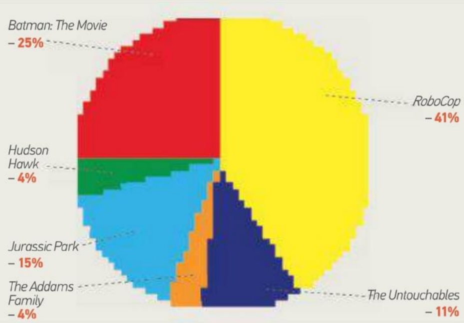
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RetroMartin The original was miles ahead of its time and a cracking game to play!

Rinoa Although I've not played the 3D version, *Snake Eater* on the PS2 was superb.

HOT TOPIC

Best Ocean film licence



"I've gone with *Jurassic Park* on the grounds that they worked with the various different technologies available to work the best games most suited to the various platforms."
–lanky316

"I loved *Batman*, and it was cracking game, but I'm afraid *Robocop* beats it hands down."
– JetSetWilly

disappointed that the machine I consider as even more 'retro' than the machines that get covered extensively in the mag - i.e. Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad - doesn't get the love and attention I feel it deserves. It had a ton of games on it, and I think it is hugely underrated as a games machine, and really, I feel, it should have a lot more written on it, in particular about its games. In fact I feel it should be done as a service to Steve Jobs and I am going to picket nude outside my council hall if nothing is done about this matter. Even if it's cold and I don't have the heat of a coffee flask to defend me.

Best wishes,

Tony D

Don't worry, Tony, you won't have to picket nude anytime soon. There was a retrospective piece on *Dangerous Dave* by John Romero in issue 100 and we'll continue to make sure the system gets featured in Minority Report. We're also arranging some 'making of's with games that appeared on the system. Stay tuned.

> "I am going to picket nude outside my council hall if nothing is done about this matter"

MAC ATTACK

Dear Staff at Retro Gamer,

I really enjoy your magazine, and am writing in to find out if you have ever done any coverage of the Mac based game *Marathon*, which was made in 1994 (one year after *Doom*). I just managed to find a compatible version of the game and have been reminded of what a deviously challenging game it is. It's almost as difficult as trying to preserve my Super Nintendo from old age and dust. The gameplay is superb and the graphics are far better, in my opinion, then the vast majority of Nintendo 64 games throughout the late 90s. I would love to see more coverage of this game, as it seems to be almost unheard of within my generation.

If you do write an article upon this game please let me know, as it would genuinely make my day

Yours faithfully,

Stefan Alexander Bratt

We've had a few people ask about *Marathon*, so we'll see what we can sort out. We were in touch with one of the developers, so we'll see if we can track him down and persuade him to talk about the franchise. It's a great series of games, and definitely deserves coverage in the mag, we just want to make sure there's some developer input before we commit to it.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

PS VITA

This month Darran has been boring everyone with his constant PS VITA posing. He spends every day mentioning how great *Uncharted: Golden Abyss* is, and ramming it under the face of anyone who unwisely strays into the Retro Gamer pod. Fiercely protective of his sleek new device, he was unwilling to let Stuart touch it, until he pointed out that if he couldn't he'd never be able to write his second opinion on *WipEout 2048*.



AUTOGRAPH LOVE

Dear Retro Gamer

Just wanted to say that I absolutely adored all the autographs that feature in your 100th issue. It's amazing that you were able to get so many big named developers to contribute, and it's further proof of just how well respected Retro Gamer is. It was an amazingly nice touch, and makes it feel like I have a one-of-a-kind issue.

Thanks for all the hard work.

Stuart Bamber

The autographs appear to have gone down really. Here's an additional one from Michel Ancel, which arrived just a little too late to be included in the issue.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Lumines Electronic Symphony

Yes it's just more *Lumines*, but it remains one of the best puzzle games ever made. I've already put in around 16 hours, and it's as fiendishly addictive as ever.





STUART

Syndicate

I've been anxiously awaiting *Syndicate*'s arrival, and though I've found the single-player campaign to be a little run of the mill, and nothing like the Bullfrog classic, the excellent co-op mode has certainly hooked me in.





MARTYN

Resident Evil Revelations

I'm really enjoying this 3DS spin-off. It feels like playing the old PS1 games in many ways - lots of creepy corridors, a few decent puzzles and limited health/ammo resources (scanning for stuff is fun too).

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Imagine Publishing Ltd
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www.retrogamer.net

Magazine team
Editor Darran Jones
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk
01202 586237
Editor in Chief Rick Porter
Designer Kate Logsdon
Features Editor Stuart Hunt
Senior Sub Editor Mat Hoddy
Sub Editors Olly Dean, Rebecca Richards
Senior Art Editor Greg Whitaker
Head of Design Ross Andrews

DESIGNER OF THE YEAR

Contributors
Adam Buchanan, Richard Burton, Paul Davies, Paul Drury, Andrew Fisher, Charles Goddard, Craig Grannell, Jason Kelk, Iain Lee, Tom Law, Graeme Mason, Damien McFerran, Anne-Claire Pickard, Michael Reed, Sorrel Tilley

Cover Illustration: Bob Wakelin

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Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request
Advertising Director James Willmott
01202 586432
james.willmott@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Head of Sales Hang Deretz
01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk
Senior Account Manager Matthew Knifton
01202 586434
matthew.knifton@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
+44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
Head of Subscriptions Lucy Nash
subscriptions@imagine-publishing.co.uk
For all subscription enquiries
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Head of Circulation Darren Pearce
01202 586200

Production
Production Director Jane Hawkins
01202 586200

Founders
Group Managing Director Damian Butt
Group Finance & Commercial Director Steven Boyd
Group Creative Director Mark Kendrick

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Happy birthday!



As it reaches its 30th anniversary, key developers, designers and journalists pay tribute to the humble ZX Spectrum

ALSO IN THE NEXT ISSUE



Cybernoid

■ Raffaele Cecco reveals how he created one of the best shoot-'em-ups to appear on the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad.



The X-Wing Series

■ Totally Games created a hit *Star Wars* videogame adaptation. We reveal the creation of the entire series.



Super Mario RPG

■ The lead developer on one of the earliest crossovers – and one of Mario's best RPG outings – recalls its creation.



WipEout

■ With *WipEout 2048* still wowing on Vita, we chart the development history of Sony's futuristic racing series.



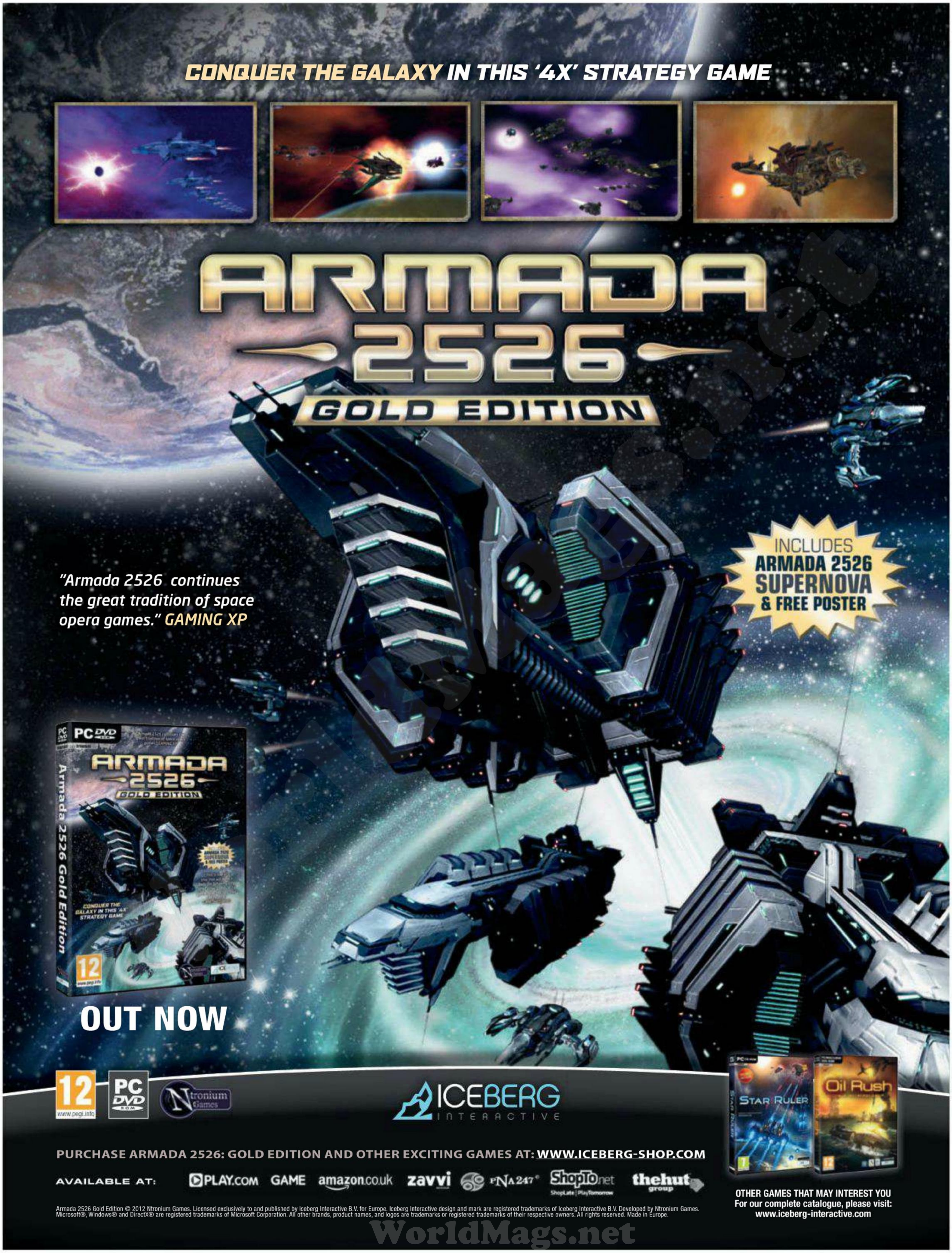
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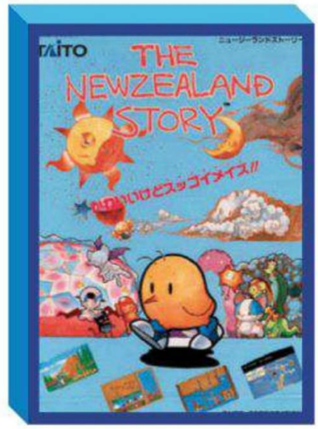

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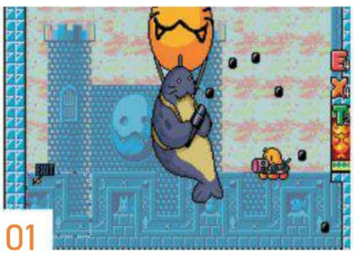

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ENDGAME

THE NEW ZEALAND STORY

» When Tiki's friends and girlfriend get kidnapped by a leopard seal with a plan for making a fast buck in the kiwi-trafficking trade, it falls to him to rescue them. What follows is a colourful, challenging and madcap adventure that finds Tiki fighting crazy animals and jumping into various vehicles to stop the dastardly seal.





01

» *The New Zealand Story* is full of absurd moments, so when you finally catch up to Wally the seal, your brain is desensitised to the sight of him flying a balloon and armed with a rocket launcher, fighting a kiwi bird driving a laser-firing UFO.



02

» With Wally defeated, the game recounts all the events leading up to this moment. It's kind of like getting a second attract screen. So yes, as you know, this adventure begins in a zoo in the country of… erm… Damn, where's it set again?



03

» Anyway, this seal – nasty fellow – kidnaps Tiki's girlfriend and all their mutual kiwi friends, and then sticks them in a bag. It hangs off Wally's shoulder in a relaxed manner, but Tiki can hear them crying for help.



04

» It turns out that Wally has plans to sell the kiwis to C3PO for a life-changing sum of money. Apparently George Lucas desperately needs 30 kiwis for a $156,000 stunt involving kiwis for his latest movie, and sent his loyal droid to broker the deal.



05

» What we think the game is trying to say here is that there is clearly no need to recount the rest of the story as you should be fairly familiar with it, having spent the last hour or so playing out events. Well, we're glad that's all cleared up.


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